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NED TEMPLE WAS AS A TOY IN THE GRIP OF THE MAD HUNTER OF POWDER RIVER,

Ned Temple,

THE BORDER BOY;

OR,
The Mad Hunter of Powder River.

A Romance of Montana.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,
AUTHOR OF "HIDDEN LODGE," "DANDY JACK,"
"OLD FROSTY," "GOLD TRIG-
GER," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. A B A N D O N E D.

A LONG and delightful summer day was taking its departure when two horses emerged from the waters of Powder River in Montana a short distance below the site of Fort Reno.

The animals showed signs of fatigue, and when they struck the firm earth of the river-bank they would have stopped if their riders had not urged them forward.

"The next minute will tell the tale, Cyrille," said one of the riders addressing his companion. "I cannot think that Uncle Sam has authorized this cowardly abandonment of his outposts. No! I am certain that to night we will sleep beneath the stars and stripes of Fort Reno."

"I hope—I trust so," was the answer. "I pray Heaven that we have not been abandoned in this death-land of Sioux and Crow."

"If we have been may the vengeance of Heaven overtake the man who did it."

The lips of the speaker, a boy of seventeen, closed behind the last word and, enraged at the thought, he struck his horse with the spurs and dashed away.

His companion, a young girl as beautiful as the flowers of the plains, followed him closely, and a minute later the two gained the top of a grassy knoll at the same time.

For a second they looked northward, and then a cry of astonishment escaped the boy's lips, and the face of the girl grew deathly white.

"The fiend has exhibited his heartlessness. Look! Cyrille, Fort Reno, like the other two, has been abandoned, and the torch and tomahawk have destroyed all that the soldiers left behind. Thornton Hardinge, may the fates curse you—curse you!"

The girl Cyrille remained silent, but the look that rested on the lone and blackened spot over which a few days before she had seen the Stars and Stripes wave proudly, was full of the helplessness of despair.

Not so the boy's.

"We'll go down and see," he said.

"Maybe," remarked Cyrille, speaking for the first time in a long while, "maybe the Indians attacked the fort and took it. To know that such was the case would be preferable to believing that he left me to the mercy of Red Cloud and his red warriors."

"Which is just what he has done, as you will soon discover," declared the youth.

They rode down the knoll and toward the place where they had expected to see Fort Reno. As they advanced they crossed the road that led to Fort Fetterman, in the far south, and the boy's quick eye detected the fresh mark of wagon-wheels on its surface.

"Just as I told you," he said, pointing downward. "The fort has been voluntarily abandoned by the regular troops."

They drew rein on what was the parade square within the walls of Fort Reno. It was now covered with blackened timbers, officers' barracks, the stockades, and so forth.

The Indians had destroyed the empty post; unable to take the scalps of the garrison, they had applied the torch to everything combustible.

Several days must have elapsed since the redskins' visit, for the ruins were smokeless and quite cold.

Slowly the sun went down while the abandoned pair silently contemplated the ruins of Fort Reno.

They knew that Forts Phil Kearney on the Piney, and C. F. Smith on the Big Horn, had been abandoned, for during their journey from Fort Buford, Indian scouts had so informed them. And now Reno had shared the same fate, and the Government had abandoned to Indian rule and ruin one of the richest countries on the face of the globe.

"I never liked Thornton Hardinge," almost hissed the boy, turning so suddenly that Cyrille started. "I told you last winter that, if he was your uncle, he was a man who would bear watching. Now, what do you say? He knew we were to leave Buford on the 9th. Why did he not send a Crow scout to meet us with the news of Reno's abandonment? Or, why did he not stay here until we came? I tell you, Cyrille, he is a bad man, and—pardon me!—a villain who disgraces the Government blue he wears."

Cyrille Averill did not resent the epithet bestowed upon her relative; but her eyes seemed to flash and her hands closed madly.

"I never liked him," she confessed. "I always thought that my Uncle Thornton would bear watching."

"Ay, that he will! But look! it is getting dark."

Cyrille for the first time seemed to notice this; the fire-scarred timbers were no longer distinguishable; it was a mass of dark ruins that surrounded them.

"Yonder is the Fort Fetterman trail," said the boy, pointing southward.

"The garrison is two or three days ahead of us. Shall we follow?"

"What is behind us?"

"Indians! Red Cloud and his bloodthirsty cut-throats."

"Might they not be between us and Fort Fetterman?"

"Yes. I am not going to try to conceal from you the fact that just now we are probably the only white people in this vicinity. We are in the midst of the hostile country. The lands of the Sioux are on every hand. We are environed by death, Cyrille, for which you can blame your uncle, Thornton Hardinge."

"He is my uncle no longer!" cried the girl, "but a villain of the deepest dye, always a plotter, and a man who would stoop to anything to gain his ends."

The boy's eyes flashed with triumph.

"That's the way I like to hear her talk," he thought to himself. "When she hates that man as I do, then I will cease to fear him."

A few minutes later the deserted pair had dismounted, and the boy had built a shelter for his fair companion. A few boards that had escaped the savage fire sufficed for this, and the long grass in which the Powder River region abounds made a downy cot for her.

The horses, hopped, were enjoying the rich provender of the country, and the youthful couple tried to find a meal among the dry victuals which they had carried for several days.

Their sense of loneliness was heightened by the long hoot of the Montana owl, that came up from the river foliage, and then the dismal howl of the prairie wolf assailed their ears.

"We shall not want for neighbors," Cyrille remarked with a faint smile, as she looked up into Ned Temple's face. "But they will not find us here to-morrow night."

"They must not. If we had not dismissed our Crow guides we would be on the way to Fetterman, or back to Buford at sunrise. But now—now, Cyrille, we are abandoned here, and for a purpose, too!"

The girl gave the speaker a look of wonder.

"Yes; for a purpose," he repeated. "He—Thornton Hardinge—wanted you deserted in the Sioux country. He never wants to see your face again, and me—well, before he dies he will wish a thousand times that Ned Temple had never crossed the Missouri. He isn't alone in his villainy, Cyrille. He mustn't receive credit for all the ingenious ideas that he promulgates; there is a power behind the throne, a man who is his equal in rascally doings."

"To whom do you refer?"

"Can you not guess?"

Before the girl could reply, the sound of hoofs and the whinny of a strange horse, caused the boy to spring up, and a moment later she was at his side, gazing breathlessly toward the south.

A full round moon was in the heavens when the sun went down, and its beams were falling upon the ruins and their surroundings. But Ned Temple and his companion stood in the shadow of one of the remnants of Reno's walls, and were waiting anxiously for the horseman.

He presently came in sight right between them and the silvery disk of the moon, and there reined in his steed.

A quaint-looking fellow he was, slim as an arrow, and as straight as one, with an old slouched hat on his head, and a clear-cut, weasel face. He sat on his horse about forty feet from the eager watchers, and seemed to be surveying the ruins of the fort.

"May I catch the chicken-pox afore next Christmas, ef they hevn't pulled up stakes an' lit out!" said a clear, falsetto voice. "They took everything, not even a sick pony left behind," and the man seemed to laugh at his own words. "Uncle Sam war a 'tarnal fool fer buildin' the forts hyar in the first place; but if

he didn't intend to hold 'em, why did he build 'em? The Injuns hev full swing in the Powder river kentry now. Red Cloud an' his devils will hev to go to scalpin' crows an' snakes; thar ar' no soldiers leit to scalp. But I'm lyar—hyar in the corruption an' the ills ov the flesh—I am, by hokey!" and he bestowed an emphatic slap on his horse's neck. "I war hyar last week, but not a word was said about pullin' up stakes," he went on. "They didn't want me to go with 'em. I war to be left hyar fer seed; yes, that's it—left fer seed! ha! ha! ha!" and the gaunt fellow lifted himself in the stirrups and laughed.

"Who is he?" whispered Cyrille.

"Some wild man," said Ned. "I guess we don't want to make his acquaintance."

"No! no! he looks like those whisky-traders of Fort Buford, and they are worse than Indians."

"Wal, if I've been left fer seed I'll jest take root an' grow in this confounded kentry," continued the strange individual. "I'll go up on the Rosebud whar I kin find plenty ov wildcats an' Injuns. By hokey! I hevn't killed a wildcat fer three days, nor an Injun fer four, an' I'm losin' flesh in consequence. Three wildcats an' two Injuns per day ar' my natural allowance—the cats ar' to be taken in doses ov one, the Injuns all at once."

Ned Temple could not repress a smile at the remarks of the singular man who believed himself alone among the ruins of Fort Reno.

"I'd like to know what he calls himself?" he thought. "I may have heard of him before."

"I must be goin'. The ground is softer upon the Rosebnd, an' I kin plant myself thar without much diffikiltiy. Old Sam Wildcat—"

Ned lost the rest of the sentence in the light cry that welled from Cyrille's throat.

"For mercy's sake don't let him see me!" she said. "Sam Wildcat? Well do I recollect the name and the man. He is the same man who came to Fort Buford last spring and offered me four bleeding Indian scalps for a kiss, and I got rid of his insults only by dashing a lot of boiling water into his face. Oh, the mad look he gave me as he left! And he is here now, like an evil spirit, and at the moment when Thornton Hardinge has abandoned us to the mercy of the human wolves that people this country."

The sight of the man among the ruins filled the girl with terror, and Ned's arm led her back to the shelter he had lately built for her.

As he left her he heard Sam Wildcat's voice again.

"Injuns! Maybe they'll give me a chance to take my reg'lar dose ov blood purifier."

He glanced at Cyrille. She had heard all.

"Better the Sioux than that man!" she murmured.

All at once Sam Wildcat disappeared and a minute afterward two Indians mounted on ponies, occupied the ground just deserted.

Ned saw that they were Sioux warriors.

Suddenly the crack of a rifle startled the young spectator, and one of the Indians, reeling from his buffalo blanket, struck the ground to stagger forward and fall dead at Cyrille's feet.

The young girl shrunk back with a cry as the remaining savage, with a mad yell, dashed to-

ward the marksman, now, of course, invisible. Ned held his breath. He seemed to be thinking that Sam Wildcat was waiting for the second Indian not far off.

His thoughts were swiftly confirmed, for a loud cry suddenly rent the air, and the words "Thar! I've taken my reg'lar dose!" told him that another Sioux warrior had been killed.

"Now I am goin'," continued Sam Wildcat; "I'll pay my respects to the rest at some future time, but no more Injun in mine at present, if you please."

The rest?

What did he mean?

Ned's mental question was speedily answered. A hundred mad yells had replied to the deafening cry of the second Indian, and a legion of cavalry seemed to be coming pell-mell up the Fetterman road.

Indians! and "hostiles" at that.

The boy leaped back to where Cyrille was and caught up a repeating rifle.

Cyrille snatched a revolver from his belt, and, cocking it, stationed herself proudly at his side.

CHAPTER II.

SAM WILDCAT'S PRIZE.

SCREENED by the little shelter lately erected, the young couple waited for the Indians.

"I fear that escape is impossible," said Ned to Cyrille. "If we are discovered, shall we surrender or fight? what do you say?"

"Let us await developments."

"Very well."

The boy turned from the girl and with ready rifle crept around the rude shanty, and disappeared. Cyrille heard the sound of hoofs that each moment grew more distinct, and all at once the Indian band drew rein on the very spot where Sam Wildcat had unseated his first Sioux.

She might have counted them, as every figure was plainly seen in the brilliant moonlight; but at that moment the numbering of her deadly foes was far from her mind.

"What do I see and whose voice do I hear?" she exclaimed suddenly, shrinking back. "It must be so! The Indians have overtaken the soldiers, and Uncle Thornton has fallen into their merciless hands. Ned?"

"I am here."

Cyrille looked around; the boy was at her side.

"What do you think of him now? Yonder he is, hand in glove with Red Cloud."

"Not willingly, Ned," was Cyrille's reply. "The troops have been overtaken between here and Fort Fetterman, and he is among the few spared."

"You would not think so if you had heard what I have. Are his hands tied like a captive's? He sits hip to hip with Red Cloud himself. There! they are going on now. We shall escape!"

The column was moving on, and the hindmost riders were about to disappear, when a yell of discovery rent the air.

"They've found Wildcat's victim," whispered Ned. "I hope they will not hunt for the other one."

Ned Temple left Cyrille again and crept forward.

Red Cloud and his warriors had discovered the dead body of the second Sioux. The sight had maddened the savages, and their yells and threats of vengeance against the slayer made a perfect bedlam.

"Trail him down!" cried Red Cloud. "Back to the trail! Red Cloud will not sleep until the skin of the slayer feeds the fires of the stake."

His commands were received with great delight, and a general dismounting took place.

"They will not leave a foot of ground unsearched," said Ned, darting back to Cyrille's side. "Quick! the high grass of the river is our only hope."

Seizing the girl's hand, he dashed away in the shadows of the blackened beams of Fort Reno. Fortune seemed to favor them, for, unseen and unfollowed as they fondly thought, they reached the river-bank, where, side by side, with wildly throbbing hearts, they crouched in the luxuriant grass that grew there.

A short distance away, as certain sounds told them, the Indians were hunting for Sam Wildcat's trail. The dead body of the shelter had just been found, and the discovery had increased the red-skins' rage.

Once or twice a dark figure approached the river, but speedily vanished again.

Suddenly, a shout that announced an important discovery fell upon the ears of the fugitives.

Ned sprung erect.

"They have found our horses," he said. "They well know that they were not ridden by their own people, and now the hunt for us will begin. Oh, Thornton Hardinge! I wish I held your life at my carbine's muzzle!"

"You'll never find it thar ef you expose yer carcass in that manner," said a voice at his elbow, and Ned turned as Cyrille sprung to his side.

Standing near by, with his tall figure towering above the river grass, stood the man they supposed far away—Sam Wildcat.

A stride brought the Indian-killer face to face with the youthful pair, but Cyrille tried to keep her features from his searching gaze.

"A gal an' a boy, by hokey!" exclaimed Sam. "What on earth ar' you doin' hyar? Did the soldiers leave you behind when they sneaked out o' Injundom?"

"We came here after the fort had been abandoned."

"From whar?"

"From Fort Buford."

"Alone?"

"No, sir; we had several Crow guides who had promised to stay with us until we reached Reno; but twenty miles up the river they suddenly deserted us, and we made the rest of the journey alone."

"What's your handle, boy?" quizzed Sam.

"Ned Temp'."

"An' the ga's?"

Ned hesitated. He was afraid that the mention of his fair companion's name would recall to the Sioux-killer the incident which Cyrille had lately mentioned—his repulse by boiling water.

"Mebbe she hasn't any name," said the rough fellow, seizing Cyrille's arm. "Come out inter the moonshine. I want to get a squint at yer. By hokey! she's as purty as a pict'r, a reg'lar daisy, the beauty ov the blossom ov the profile ov the mountain. I've steered ag'in' her somewhar; haven't I, gal?"

"Yes, sir," said Cyrille, certain that exposure would come, and resolved to anticipate it. "We met once at Fort McPherson. Surely you have not forgotten the captain's child."

"What! the gal what guv' Sam Wildcat a b'ilin' water cathartic?" cried the Indian-slaver. "Wal, I should reckon you ain't forgotten. Didn't I say that I would get even with you one ov these days fur thet smart trick? An' hevn't I got you now, my rose-blossom?"

The eyes of the rough seemed to emit fiery sparks of triumph.

"I am here," suddenly cried Ned, laying his hands on Wildcat's arm. "You must not harm Cyrille. We are helpless—that is, we have been cruelly abandoned in Sioux land, and I have sworn to protect Cyrille from every danger. You must offer her no indignity, I say."

Sam Wildcat was inclined to laugh contemptuously. He despised the boy who had spoken.

"You her protector?" he retorted. "Why, I could crush you with my little finger. You don't know me. I'm Sam Wildcat! The man what has been left in this kentry fur seed. I'm the walkin' death ov these parts. Ef you think I'm givin' you a game ov wind, go an' ask Red Cloud over yonder how much he'd give fur my scalp. So you're the protector ov this rosebud, eh? By hokey! it beats the funny stories in last year's almanac. Come hyar, my holly-hock!"

Cyrille resisted with an appealing look at Ned, and quick as thought the click of the carbine's lock was heard.

"Insult Cyrille if you dare, brute!" said Ned. "Release her this instant, or I'll send a bullet through your brain. You could save us from those Indians over yonder. Does not a helpless girl appeal to your better nature?"

"She does, by hokey!" exclaimed Sam, who did not shrink in the least from the muzzle of the carbine, nor release Cyrille. "A helpless woman kin always draw on Sam Wildcat fur help, an' he will take pleasure in honorin' the draft. But this gal—this pink ov Sioux land! By hokey! I must kiss her once."

"Spare me!" cried Cyrille. "You should be guidin' us to safety, not—"

"Unhand her! If you do not, I will carry out my threat," and as Ned spoke he seized Cyrille and wrenched her from Wildcat's grasp.

"Now, sir," he continued, placing himself between her and the tormentor, "if you will not help us, you will leave us to help ourselves."

For a moment Sam Wildcat stood bewildered before the daring boy, then he took a stride forward, and before Ned could prepare for his action, he found his carbine wrenched from his hand.

"I'm a hull den ov wildcats when you stir me up," he cried. "I'm worse nor an Injun nation on wheels. Yes, I'm willin' to get the rosebud outer this diffikiltiy, but you'll pardon me, I hope, if I leave you behind!"

"No! no! if you can't save Ned, too, I will stay here!" Cyrille exclaimed. "We have promised faithfully to stay together."

"You needn't break the promise, fur I'll take all responsibility onto myself, and fracture the agreement."

The next moment Ned found himself in the Indian-slaver's grasp. He exerted his utmost strength to get loose, but a minute told him that he struggled in vain; he was as a toy in the gripe of the Mad Hunter of Powder River.

Ned felt himself lifted above the hunter's head, and then, while Cyrille, paralyzed with terror, as it were, stood not far away, he went whirling through the air toward the moonlit waters of the Powder.

"Now, my rosebud!" hoarsely cried Wildcat, whirling upon Cyrille, as Ned struck the water, "we've just finished the preface ov one ov Sam Wildcat's books. Now let's begin the first chapter. Come!"

"Not with you," Cyrille said, retreating. "Better the clutches of Red Cloud."

The man leaped after her, and the next moment a piercing cry for help rung from her throat.

A wild oath shot from Wildcat's lips as he seized her, and started on a run toward his horse, that had been near all the time.

"Now, Lightnin', carry us outer this pickle an' I'll pension you fer life," he said to the animal, that darted away like an arrow shot from a Sioux strong bow.

Cyrille's cry had been heard. A responsive cry, or a series of yells, came over the bluff, beyond which Red Cloud and his warriors were still searching for the slayer's trail.

"You stirred up the hornets, gal, an' we're in fer it now," said Sam, addressing Cyrille.

Then he struck his horse savagely with the spurs, and, as the race for life began, Cyrille shut her eyes only to see Ned struggling for existence in the treacherous current of Powder River.

CHAPTER III.

FOLLOWING TO KILL.

As rapidly as possible the late garrison of Fort Reno was pushing on to Fort Fetterman. The distance was not great; but the way was full of dangers, for the officers feared that Red Cloud and his hordes would attack from some ambush, and make the march to Fetterman a march of death.

The little band of regulars consisted of part of a regiment of cavalry, some detachments of infantry, and a train of artillery. At night the camp was formed in regular military order, the soldiers sleeping on their arms, ready at a moment's notice to repel the assaults of the foe.

On the night that witnessed Ned and Cyrille's adventures at Fort Reno, a group of excited officers stood in the light of one of the camp-fires. The faces of all told that something inexplicable had transpired.

Colonel Armstrong, the commander of the troops, a brusque, heavily-whiskered man, and an old plainsman, had just turned abruptly upon a sun-browned sergeant who evidently stood in the witness-box.

"Well, sir, when did you last see Captain Hardinge?" asked the colonel tartly.

"About four o'clock last night."

"Goodloe saw him an hour later. We don't want your testimony."

The sergeant was about to retire when an officer of the cavalry, a young man, touched Colonel Armstrong's arm.

"I would like to ask the man one question," he said quietly.

"I see no use in doing so. We have Goodloe's evidence. But," reluctantly, "you can put your question if you wish."

The young cavalryman bit his lip, but turned upon the witness. As he did so, he whispered hurriedly to a major at his side:

"Watch Ben Simon as I put the questions. He is standing on your left."

Then to the sergeant:

"You say that you saw Hardinge last at four o'clock last night. Now, sir, what was he doing?"

The witness hesitated and glanced over his right shoulder as if he wanted help from somebody not far off. Ten feet away, and in the light of the camp-fire, stood one of the scouts of the expedition, a tall, dark-skinned, wiry man, whose garments were not more than half civilized.

This man was the Ben Simon whom the cavalry officer wanted watched.

The glance of Simon and the sergeant met for an instant. On Simon's part it was so threatening that the soldier trembled. The scout's eyes seemed to say, "Tell the truth, if you dare."

"You will not tell me what Hardinge was doing when you last saw him?" said the soldier, bringing the sergeant back to the fact that he was under the eyes of his superiors.

"I need not conceal his actions from you. He was writing a letter," was the reply.

"A very harmless amusement," laughed Colonel Armstrong. "Captain, I guess you are willing to drop the witness. He does not seem to be burdened with any startling testimony, and—"

"Pardon me, colonel, at four o'clock yesterday Hardinge was not writing a letter as that witness, as well as other parties in camp well know."

"You do not accuse the sergeant?"

"I do! I accuse him of willful lying in the presence of his superior officers."

The sergeant's eyes seemed to flash, and again they sought out Ben Simon the scout, on whose rugged features sat a scowl as black as night.

"You must not be so hasty in your accusations," Colonel Armstrong said, rebukingly, to the young captain. "Unless you are able to prove that Hardinge was not engaged in letter-writing at four P. M. yesterday, I cannot listen to your charge."

"I can and will prove it," was the quick answer. "I am one of the few who say that Thornton Hardinge is a deserter, and there is one man in camp who, if he could be induced to tell the truth, would sustain me in the belief."

"To whom do you refer?"

"I do not like to place him on the witness stand, and besides, we could not, as he is not an enlisted man."

"Oh! one of the scouts!" cried the colonel. "Bring them here."

The next instant Ben Simon disappeared; gliding away like a serpent, he soon passed beyond the light of the fire, and when he found himself safe he turned toward the improvised court of inquiry.

"Of course Thornton Hardinge has deserted, but you won't catch me blabbing it," he hissed.

"You did well not to mention my name, Major Beverly, and if Sergeant Knight doesn't pay you for the epithet you saw fit to bestow upon him, then he ought to be eaten by crows."

He was about to move away when a soldier appeared in sight.

"Hallo, Simon! You're the very man I'm looking for. The colonel wants all the independent scouts before him at once," said the soldier.

"He does, eh?" flashed Ben Simon.

"Such are his orders."

"I might as well face him," thought the scout, "but I guess I can keep my own counsel," and the next minute he was tramping back to the camp-fire he had just deserted.

His reappearance caused a slight commotion among several officers, and Major Beverly's eyes seemed to glow with triumph.

"Yonder is the man who knows all—Ben Simon," whispered Beverly to the colonel. "I'll warrant you that he saw Hardinge last of all."

Colonel Armstrong wheeled upon the scout and folded his arms on his breast with officer-like precision.

"Simon," he said, brusquely, "where is Captain Hardinge of the—th cavalry?"

"Dead, mebbe," was the answer.

"We want civil answers; no witticisms," snapped Armstrong. "Where is he?"

Ben Simon's face grew dark again, and throwing a malicious glance at Major Beverly, who was eying him closely, he stepped forward.

"A lie won't mend matters now," he said, "and, as the cap'n is out of harm's way, I might as well tell the truth. He's taken a bit of French leave."

"Deserted the command?"

"You may call it that if you want to."

"Whither has he gone?"

"North'ard, I suspect."

"You are certain of this, Simon?"

"I am, colonel; but I didn't like to tell on him because me an' him hev been friends."

"Of course; we appreciate that; Captain Hardinge a deserter? What led him to this course?"

"That's a private matter, I guess," the scout said.

"We must post him. By George! every fort shall hear of his cowardly deed, and when he falls into my hands I'll make a sieve out of him. To-morrow, major," to Beverly, "we'll prepare our handbills, and I will send you back to Buford. Simon, you will accompany Major Beverly to Fort Buford to-morrow."

"To-morrow? If we are to get ahead of Cap'n Hardinge, I think we had better start tonight," ventured the scout.

Armstrong glanced at his watch. "I will see about it. Come back here at ten o'clock, two hours hence."

Ben Simon withdrew, and the court of inquiry was broken up.

Enough had been learned. Thornton Hardinge was a deserter; but the colonel did not suspect the depth of his treachery. Hardinge had never been an army favorite, although as brave as a lion; he had too much of the bar-room bully about him, and, besides, he was scheming and full of low cunning.

He had served on the plains for ten years, and during that time had made many unenviable acquaintances. Scouts had reported that he seemed to be well known to Sitting Bull and Red Cloud, each of whom had praised his gallantry in the last Indian war.

But that he should desert the service and turn his back upon the little column struggling to Fort Fetterman, Colonel Armstrong could hardly believe.

About two hours after the examination of Ben Simon, the scout, by Armstrong, four apparent scouts, well mounted, on fleet horses left the camp, and turned their faces toward the far-away forks of Powder River. One was easily distinguished as Simon, and his companions looked as much the independent ranger as he.

But they were not all scouts. The shapely figure at Simon's right was Major Beverly, who had been commissioned to carry to Fort Buford and other Government posts at the north, a number of handbills offering a reward for Hardinge's arrest.

Ben Simon cast many a wicked glance at the man who rode beside him.

"Major Beverly, you're a blarsted fool!" he said to himself. "I wonder if you expect to live to report to Colonel Armstrong. You want to find Cap'n Hardinge, eh? Wal, you shall hev thet honor, but curse my boots if you'll ever live to tell of the meetin' at the camp-fire of the —th cavalry. Old Ben Simon are at yer heels—the man what you've insulted, and he's goin' to see yer scalp stretchin' on an Injun hoop!"

A hideous smile wreathed the scout's face as he spoke, for, like many of his class, Ben Simon was more Indian than white man.

And Major Beverly, the favorite officer of one of the crack regiments of the service, was galloping into Red Cloud's country, with such a viper at his elbow.

Do not sleep for a minute, gallant major, if you want to report in person to Colonel Armstrong beneath the Stars and Stripes of Fort Fetterman.

CHAPTER IV.

CYRILLE ENCOUNTERS A MONSTER.

As there was no road along the river, Sam Wildcat had to take the Fetterman trail.

His horse was a fleet, strong-limbed animal, not used to carrying two persons; but able to perform the feat.

An Indian yell behind him soon announced that the sounds of his flight had reached the ears of his foe, and he speedily knew that the red Arabs of the plains were thundering at his heels.

"This ar' no scrub race, my blossom," he remarked, as he looked into Cyrille's face, as she,

forgetting, as it were, that she was a captive, clung to him with all the grasp she could command. "Mebbe we kin both git away, an' mebbe we can't. Old Lightnin' ar' the boss hoss ov these parts, an' he'll do his best; you kin bet yer bottom dollar on that, gal. But ef both ov us can't git away, one kin, I know."

What did he mean?

Would he abandon her to the mercy of the Indians and save himself?

"He is quite likely to do so," thought Cyrille.

The thought had hardly been uttered by her lips when Sam Wildcat drew rein and halted his foam-covered horse.

"It ar' no use," he said. "Lightnin' hez been carryin' more nor his quota. He must carry only one from this out."

Cyrille's heart sunk within her.

"The Injuns must take care ov you fur a while," continued Sam. "Never mind; they'll not harm a hair ov your head, Rosebud. Why, afore a week, one-half ov the young bucks will be makin' love to yo', but I'll skirmish around an' git back in time to spile a few ov their arrangements."

He was lifting her from the horse, and he placed her gently on the ground.

"I'll come back fur you, an' I'll find you, too."

"I hope not," said Cyrille. "I have all along suspected a second abandonment. May your horse stumble soon, and, falling on you, hold you fast for the tomahawks of the Sioux."

"Now that would be outrageous," said the Indian-killer, with a grin. "I couldn't git to take my reg'lar dose—two Injuns a day—any more. What! Old Lightnin' stumble! You don't know the critter. Good-by, Rosebud."

Cyrille saw the horse dash forward once more, but this time he did not carry her.

No! She stood alone on that lonely trail with the noise of approaching hoofs ringing in her ears.

The Indians were coming!

"Flight would not save me," she said, "and Red Cloud may not be the merciless red fiend that he is called. If my uncle is his captive, we will share each other's trials. I cannot believe that he is a traitor—that he left me to perish here in Sioux land."

The next minute a quartet of Indians uttered cries of wonder at the apparition of a young girl on the trail, and recoiled so suddenly that they forced their steeds back on their haunches.

"Where white man?" they demanded.

Cyrille pointed down the trail.

The Sioux looked and listened. Sam Wildcat had passed out of sight, and the sound of his horse's hoofs no longer came back to the red-men.

When the Indians leaped to the ground Cyrille was instantly surrounded.

She had seen Indians before, but for the first time she stood in their presence, a captive.

"Girl party," said one, a young buck. "Hands white as snow, and eyes like the stars. The young bucks of the village will have to fight for her. Her make wigwam smile all the time."

"I may prove an evil spirit to you all," Cyrille said, seeing that the young Indians exhibited no resentment. "Where is your chief?"

"Red Cloud? We take girl back to him and let white hunter go."

"Yes, I want to see Red Cloud."

Cyrille was lifted upon one of the horses, and the band was soon galloping back to join Red Cloud.

"Now I will see Thornton Hardinge, and solve the mystery that clings to his presence here," she thought. "If he hates me, I will discover all."

The ride back was uneventful to Cyrille. The moon went down, but they still kept on. When near the ruins of Fort Reno the Indians left the trail and struck northward.

Daylight found them riding slowly down a little valley whose mountainous surroundings were wild and grotesque.

"You are not taking me to Red Cloud," Cyrille suddenly exclaimed. "You have deceived me."

"Red Cloud away over yonder," one of the Sioux said pointing over the mountains. "Indians brought girl here to fight for her. She can't be squaw to all."

In the middle of the valley the four Indians sprung from their horses which they turned off to graze on the rich grass that abounded on every side, and unslung the long bows that they carried on their backs.

Now that daylight had fairly returned, poor Cyrille had a fair opportunity of seeing her captors.

They were strong young fellows, rich in muscle and good Indian looks, and the scanty garments that they wore proved them veritable athletes to the girl.

After a short parley in the Sioux tongue, the braves separated in pairs and walking away turned and faced one another with twenty yards between them.

Cyrille saw them fit the feathered barbs to their bows and draw the arrows to their iron heads.

"Girl count three," said the nearest Indian, glancing over his shoulder at Cyrille. "Indian heard white soldiers count in the forts, and him understand. Girl count—quick!"

"I will count!" said our heroine, stepping forward. "And may each arrow find an Indian heart!"

Then she exclaimed:

"One—two—three!"

The twanging of four bow-strings seemed blended into one report, and the arrows sped away on their mission of death.

Cyrille uttered a cry as two of the red duelists, one in each rank, reeled away, arrow-pierced, and dropped their bows to fall dead on the grass. The other two remained unharmed.

Quick as thought the survivors snatched new arrows from the quivers which they had placed on the ground, and drew them madly to the barb.

Then springing forward until they had cleared twenty feet, they suddenly halted and fired again.

This time only one wild death-cry echoed over the secluded valley, and, pierced through the neck, one of the young bucks staggered forward to die among the green blades.

The victor, with a proud glance at Cyrille,

quietly unstrung his bow and picked up his quiver.

Then he came forward:

"The arrows of the Red Wolf found the hearts of his opponents," he said. "The fight was fair and the white girl will warm Red Wolf's lodge and smile only for him."

But Cyrille with a shudder shrunk away.

"White girl no run from her chief," cried Red Wolf as he scowled. "Him fight for her, him win her, and now him keep her!"

He bounded forward as he finished. Indian ire flashed in the depths of his dark eyes.

"Girl stop!" he commanded as Cyrille still involuntarily retreated. "If Red Wolf cannot keep, he kin kill."

The infuriated buck had drawn his tomahawk and planted himself firmly a few feet from the shrinking girl.

"Girl no stop? Then Red Wolf kill his brothers for nothin'. He will kill white girl, too."

The naked arm went back a few inches further, the tomahawk turned half-way in his hand, and then—

The sharp report of a rifle broke the stillness, and the hatchet, hurled forward, fell harmless at Cyrille's feet.

As for the young red athlete, he lay on the velvety sward with the death-gurgle in his throat.

The unexpected shot startled Cyrille and made her turn toward the mountains behind her.

"Merciful Father!" fell from her lips. "Into the hands of what kind of a monster have I fallen now?"

Well might she use the word "monster," for a few rods away quietly loading a rifle stood a being whose nether limbs were human, but who had the head and arms of a bear.

Cyrille felt fear creeping to her heart as she looked, and when the monster came forward she seemed nailed to the ground.

Nearer and nearer came the repulsive creature, his rifle slung over his shoulder, and his eyes seeing, not the girl, apparently, but the figures stretched on the grass.

He passed quite near to Cyrille, giving her a quick glance, and stooped a moment over each dead brave.

Although the astonished maiden watched him closely, she did not see him perform the scalping operation, nor did he appear to possess any such trophies when he again stood erect.

Then he seemed to turn his attention to her, and bounded forward with a strange cry.

Cyrille, seeing that escape was impossible, stood her ground until one of the hairy hands shot forward to seize her, when she suddenly reeled away and sunk back in a swoon.

The eyes of the Bear Demon seemed to glisten.

CHAPTER V.

THE TWO OFFERS OF LIBERTY.

"Hist! Injuns! we're in fur it now."

The voice was Ben Simon's, and the next moment four horsemen drew rein and cocked their revolvers.

Night had once more thrown her mantle over

the country, and the men—Major Beverly and his companions—were in the neighborhood of old Fort Reno.

They had proceeded thus far on their way to Fort Buford, and no incident, save a few false Indian alarms, had broken the monotony of the journey.

This time, however, there seemed to be grounds for fear, for the working of Ben Simon's countenance and the flash of his eyes, as he rejoined the little party after a brief reconnoissance told that he had seen something unusual.

"They are coming this way. Quick! to the grass, and cover your horses' mouths."

The command was swiftly obeyed. The men urged their steeds from the trail, and while they held their caps over their mouths with one hand the other held ready for instant use the formidable revolver of the army.

Ben Simon had not spread a false report, for the tramp of many horses soon fell upon the soldiers' ears, and the apparitions of horses and their riders greeted their eyes.

Major Beverly did not think of treachery at that moment. Instead of looking at Simon, the scout, he kept his eyes fixed on the Indians.

All at once the red-skins halted and at the same moment a voice on Beverly's left attracted that officer's attention.

Ben Simon was not at his post, although his horse was still there.

Where was the scout?

"Thar they ar', Red Cloud!" suddenly cried the traitor. "Two ov 'em ar' my cronies, but the other one is one ov the accursed blue-coats."

If a bomb had exploded at Major Beverly's feet he would not have been more astonished.

He had been betrayed, and for the first time he knew that his two other companions were men of Ben Simon's stamp.

"Devil! you shall not live to boast of your infernal treachery," the officer cried, dropping his bridle and darting toward Simon. "I'll scatter your brains over the scene of your treason."

Ben Simon involuntarily slunk away, but the two men behind Beverly quickly seized him and tried to wrest the weapon from his hand.

"White man be quiet," said a stalwart Indian who was instantly recognized by the soldier. "My braves are all mad for blood, for the secret killer walked among their camp-fires last night. White soldier must not provoke them."

"Then, Red Cloud, you and that traitorous dog are partners," flashed Beverly, glaring at Simon, who, seeing him firmly held, had ventured to come forward again. "You accept of his betrayals. Beware! some day that viper will sting you. If he is dog to us, he will prove wolf to you before he dies. Were I loose for a moment, I would do you a favor."

But Beverly was still firmly held by the two traitors, and after a while he was turned over to the Sioux, by whom he was closely guarded on the site of Fort Reno.

He had much to occupy his mind while he stood in the midst of the Indian band. His journey to Fort Buford had come to an abrupt conclusion. He had been consigned to the care of three traitors, and that by Colonel Armstrong, who had selected the trio himself.

Did another terrible thought flash across his mind while he stood in the midst of the Indian camp?

"Heaven forgive me! I do not want to think that I have an enemy at head-quarters," he muttered. "I am hurried from the command at night, with three companions, traitors, every one. What does it mean? And in what manner have I offended Leslie Armstrong?"

The thought had no pleasant associations for Major Beverly, and dismissing it as well as he could, he turned his attention again to his present situation. Armstrong was not his enemy.

"Yonder, if I am not mistaken, is an Indian whose figure has familiar outlines," he suddenly exclaimed, regarding a person holding a talk with the chief, Red Cloud. An Indian; no, he is not a Sioux, but one of those treacherous devils of the Simon stripe. Ha! he is coming toward me—a message, probably, from Red Cloud himself."

The man had left the Sioux chief, and was walking toward the soldier, now lashed firmly to a young cottonwood.

No Indians were near at that moment, and the chief's late companion came on until he stood in the shadow of the tree thrown by the firelight, and within five feet of the captive.

"Major, would you accept a favor at my hands?" he said, in a tone that made Beverly start. "If so, here is a knife. I've succeeded in doing something for you with Red Cloud. The whole band will move off directly to investigate a pretended alarm; we will leave you here. I will contrive to have a horse for you at the old ferry, and you know how to use this knife. By George! I never expected to see you in this fix, and I want to say that Simon betrayed you without a word from me."

Major Beverly did not speak until the man had finished.

He knew him now—Thornton Hardinge, of the —th cavalry!

He was not only a deserter, but was hand in glove with the red scourge of Montana.

"Captain Hardinge, why are you here in league with the scarlet fiend who had scalped a battalion of our old comrades?" cried Beverly. "We had all made up our minds that you were a deserter, but not one dreamed that you had turned Sioux."

Despite the coloring on the deserter's face, his countenance was seen to change.

"I offer you liberty, Beverly!" he cried, taking a step toward the prisoner. "And you return the favor by calling me a deserter. Do you want the knife?"

"From you? Never!"

Hardinge seemed taken aback by the answer.

"Think! I may not be able to offer you freedom any more. The young bucks egged on by Ben Simon will soon break out in a tumultuous clamor for your blood. Last night the secret terror of Red Cloud's camps was among us again, and six Sioux warriors, the flower of Indiandom, so to speak, were found this morning dead among the fires. No one knows who the mysterious slayer is. He has followed Red Cloud on every war-trail for the last two years, and the chief has been robbed of his best braves

by the terrible unknown. His deeds last night have more than maddened the young bucks whom he spared. They will cry for your blood directly. Do you think Red Cloud can prevent the shedding of it? He is only one man and he would not stand two minutes between you and the sixty demons over yonder. As for your charge, I did leave the army; but I joined Red Cloud for a purpose."

"You will be murdering our troops next," cried Beverly, bitterly.

Hardinge winced under the words, but did not reply to them.

"You will not accept freedom?" he asked, suddenly.

"I have answered you."

"Then die where you are!" was the harsh answer, and Hardinge turned on his heel and left Beverly to his reflections.

The eyes of the captive officer followed the deserter until his figure was lost to view.

"Of course he came hither for a purpose," he said. "Cyrille, if you have left Fort Buford, he must know it, and it is you that, wolf-like, he waits for here."

Then Major Beverly knew the girl Cyrille, Ned Temple's companion!

For several minutes the soldier was left alone, although he was aware that keen eyes were fixed upon him, eyes that had the baleful glitter of the cobra's orbs. Red Cloud was not in sight. Somewhere, he was listening to Hardinge's report of the interview just closed.

All at once Beverly saw the figure of the Sioux chief appear on the very spot where the deserter had stood. The sight caused the major to start violently, for he had not witnessed Red Cloud's approach.

"White man can get away. Red Cloud doesn't want his blood. His friend, the white soldier, has plead for his life—"

"Life is dear, chief, but I do not want to keep it when it comes as a gift from Thornton Hardinge's hands. He has deserted the flag of his country, and has added treason to his crime."

Red Cloud bit his lips at these words.

"Offer me freedom on your own account, and I might accept it," continued Beverly, in a different tone, "but don't lug in that sneaking deserter. I repeat that I will not accept anything at his hands—not even life itself."

Red Cloud hesitated a minute, and then sprung forward.

The next second Beverly felt a knife-blade against his hands, and heard the ropes cut through.

He was free!

"Soldier stand still," whispered the red liberator. "By 'm by Indians hear alarm, and all go to see. Then let the soldier slip down to the old ford; him find horse there, and him know which way to ride."

The Sioux chief sprung away before Beverly could frame a word of thanks, and a minute later he was out of sight.

Then he waited for the false alarm. All at once the Indians sprung up around the camp-fires, and Beverly saw Red Cloud's figure moving among them.

The Indian's part of the programme was car-

ried out well, and the major soon found himself unwatched.

Quickly gliding from the tree he made his way to the ford which had been used by the garrison of Fort Reno.

Sure enough, a horse was waiting for him, and Beverly's heart leaped for joy when he found two loaded revolvers in the holsters of the cavalry saddle.

"Thanks, Red Cloud; but none to you, Captain Hardinge!" exclaimed Beverly, preparing to vault into the saddle. "One of these days, perhaps, Major Beverly will be able to return a Sioux's one good deed."

"Major Beverly of the regulars?" exclaimed a voice so near the fleeing officer that he turned and threw back the flap of one of the holsters.

"Yes," he said, boldly, "I am Major Beverly. Who are you?"

"Ned Temple," was the answer, and the weapon half lifted, fell at the officer's side, as the speaker sprung from the tall grass and halted close by him.

Beverly could not repress an exclamation of astonishment.

"Thank Heaven! I meet a friend again!" the boy went on. "You are escaping from the Sioux—from the scourge Red Cloud. I saw a man bring the horse down here, and heard him say, talking to himself, that it was for Major Beverly. He was rejoiced at the thought of getting rid of you, for he more than half believes that Cyrille is in these parts, and, of course, he doesn't want you here at the same time."

Beverly's hand shrunk from the bridle.

"Then Hardinge is helping me. But where is Cyrille?"

"I wish to Heaven I knew."

"She is not in this country?"

"She is. We got to Fort Reno safely; but you had left. Then we were separated. I was tossed into Powder River by a fiend in human shape who called himself Sam Wildcat, and Cyrille was left in his power."

"Cyrille alone in the hands of that man?" exclaimed Beverly. "We must rescue her!"

"Of course! we will stick together," said Ned. "Major Beverly, fortune has brought us together, and when we have saved Cyrille, my promised bride—"

A hoarse, mad cry broke from Beverly's throat.

"Your promised wife, boy? Cyrille the fairy your bride? Never! by the flames of Tartarus! Go back and die at the stake or by the knives of the Sioux, in place of Major Beverly, whose blood they want. Not while I live shall Cyrille become your wife. I would die for her—I, Major Frank Beverly; but you—go back and die where I was to be sacrificed!"

Beverly held the boy in his mad grasp while he spoke, and, with the last word, he hurled him headlong away with all his might.

Then he leaped upon the horse and was soon flying along the bank of the river.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SWOOP OF THE CROWS.

NED TEMPLE, staggering from Major Beverly, struck a cottonwood and fell unconscious among the grass,

It was well for him that the tree stood in his way, for, while he lay deathlike on the ground, two figures glided up the river-bank and looked for several moments at the spot where the horse had been left.

The twain, Thornton Hardinge and Red Cloud, were satisfied that their offers of liberty had been accepted by the soldier, for after exchanging a few words in an undertone, they went away together.

When Ned regained consciousness he found himself alone and still on the bank of Powder River. His rival, the major, had long since disappeared, and a short scout told him that Red Cloud and his band had gone northward, or toward one of the large villages of that red chief, a few miles away.

"I must first find whether they overtook Sam Wildcat and Cyrille," the boy said. "I have the girl to save and that villain to punish, and I swear that I will not leave the Powder River country until I have accomplished both."

Fortunately his sudden immersion had not deprived him of any weapons. The repeating rifle which had fallen from his grasp when Wildcat sprung with him toward the water, he found again after his escape from the river, and his revolver had not been lost from his belt.

Following the Indians was no great task; the trail was as plain as a country road, and Ned did not halt until the light of another day came.

Having selected a good shelter among the hills by which he was surrounded he resolved to hide until night, when once more under the stars, he would push forward, nor pause until he knew whether Cyrille was an inmate of Red Cloud's camp.

Leaving the boy there let us precede him to the wigwams of the Sioux.

Red Cloud and his braves had kept on to the village situated on one of the estuaries of Powder River. They were captiveless, and the braves were in no good humor. Fort Reno had been abandoned by the Government, and the troops had eluded the bloodthirsty Sioux.

Thornton Hardinge began to feel uneasy from the moment of his entry into the camp. The sight of a white face was not a cheering view to the Indians unless it belonged to a captive.

It is true that Ben Simon and his companions were among the band; but they were regarded as friends to the nation, and would be treated accordingly.

If Hardinge slept the remainder of that night his eyes belied his words when he greeted Simon the next day.

The two sat together in the lodge which Red Cloud had presented to the deserter.

"Wal, we're hyar, cap'n; but you're without the gal," said Simon.

"Curse it, yes! Where is she?"

"Of course it consarns you most, but I'm gettin' oneasy about her, too. She war to leave Fort Buford on the tenth?"

"Yes."

"Who war to be the guides?"

"Two Crows, Black Robe and Uncapa."

Simon gave a long whistle.

"Them two devils?" he exclaimed, "You

couldn't hev sent two better Injuns. Cap'n, allow me to congratulate you. The gal is outeren your way," and Simon held out his tawny hand.

"Not yet, Ben. Maybe she is still at Port Buford," said Hardinge.

"Not if the Crows got thar an' I'll bet my hat that they did. Now, cap'n, ef I war as far through the woods as you ar', I'd dance a jig in this old Injun shanty."

"What plans have you?"

"A marryin' scheme."

"You?"

"Why not? I own thet I ain't as handsome as a rose, nor as good as a saraph, cap'n; but I've got a grand marryin' scheme on foot. You hev heard ov the lovely Stargold? Ov course you hev!"

"Not Red Cloud's only daughter—the princess of the Sioux?"

"She's the sunflower ov my heart," was the scout's reply.

"What does Red Cloud say?"

"By Gegrge; I never sounded the old codger. He may object—I expect he will—but I'll get the gal or die."

"Then it is a desperate case."

"Desprit? I should remark. Every young Sioux throws his first skins and his first scalp at Stargold's feet. She hes hed 'em fightin' fer her smiles fur two years. Never saw 'er cap'n?"

"I never have," said Hardinge. "I would like to see this red beauty."

"Well, we'll go down to the palace an' take a squint at the queen."

"Now?"

"Why not?"

Hardinge hesitated.

"Wait till night," he said. "The Indians must get used to my presence here before I appear among them."

"Jest as you like," remarked Simon. "I'll go down an' pay my respects to the beauty."

Hardinge saw the curtains of the lodge drop behind the scout's lank figure, and his steps soon died away in the distance.

The deserter drew them closer with his hands and pinned them with the blade of a bowie. Ever now and then footsteps passed and re-passed the lodge; but he did not look out. If he had he might have seen looks that would have troubled him.

Slowly the first day of his sojourn passed away. Simon, the traitor, had not returned. Had he fallen into the snares of the lovely Stargold and was he at her feet in Red Cloud's lodge?

"I guess I can go out now," said Hardinge, who had grown impatient since sundown. "I'm not wanted here even if Red Cloud did receive me with open arms, and tell his partners that my person was to be regarded as sacred as his own. My work in this part of the country seems to have been accomplished, if Black Robe and Uncapa did their duty. Simon never suspected anything, although he thinks that I don't care if Cyrille never calls me uncle any more."

Hardinge was unpinning the lodge curtains as he spoke, and his hands gently drew them aside.

But the next moment he stepped back with a

light exclamation of astonishment for a figure stood before him.

"White chief must go! Why does he stay here when the knives of the Sioux are ready to touch his heart?" said a girlish voice.

The soldier could not speak for a moment.

"Red Cloud is away. He will not be here to stand between the young bucks and the white chief whose blood they want because the pale slayer visits the Sioux camps."

"Just as I've been thinking," exclaimed Hardinge. "They are going to sacrifice me. Where are they?"

"They gather behind the hill," said the girl, pointing away. "They are the young chiefs—Long Scalp, Eagle Eye, Fox Tail and their brethren. Will the pale chief stay in his lodge and die?"

"Not if flight can save."

"Stargold may help him."

"Stargold! Then you are Red Cloud's child," cried Hardinge. "Where is my friend?"

"She is here. Stargold is the white chief's friend."

"No! no! my friend, Ben Simon."

"Over there with the young chiefs."

"Plotting against me? Quick! Stargold, I want to go now—not to stay away, but to come back by and by and find the heart of this accursed double-dealer."

At the thought of Ben Simon's treachery fire seemed to flash from Thornton Hardinge's eyes.

"I am ready!" he cried, stepping from the lodge. "Show me the way."

Stargold seized his hand and started forward, but came to a sudden halt.

"Too late!" she said, looking up into the soldier's face. "The wolves come for the heart of the white soldier."

"Where are they? I see nothing."

"Look yonder," said the Sioux girl, in a low whisper. "Cannot the white man see the wolves creeping forward on their bellies? One—two—three—twenty!"

"I see!" grated Hardinge, bestowing a fierce look on the moving figures. "Twenty against one. Stargold, can you point out Ben Simon? I want to send him ahead, as an *avant courier*."

"No. White man might go back and run for his life. Stargold cannot stay here. Good-by."

"Not yet, my beauty," hissed Hardinge, springing after and seizing her arm. "There shall be other blood than mine shed here to-night. By Jove! I'll rob Ben Simon of you anyhow if I cannot take his worthless life."

Muscular and strong as a lion the desperate deserter held Stargold in his grasp.

The crawling figures had halted, and resembled so many tigers crouching for a spring.

"Come on!" shouted Hardinge, inviting the combat. "I shall have the pleasure of making your tribe queenless before I go. Come on and see the trump I hold in my hands."

Not a figure moved.

"Hyar! giv' me the gal, cap'n!" suddenly cried a voice behind him, and some one was trying to take Stargold from him. "Giv' 'er to me, I say, an' leave these diggin's. The camp is full ov mountain Crows an' the two tribes will be at it in five minutes,"

Thornton Hardinge suddenly released the girl when he recognized the man that wanted her—Ben Simon!

"You were with the young bucks plotting against me, an hour ago," he said, recovering.

"That's a lie, cap'n."

"Ask that girl."

"Not now. Ar' you goin' to stand hyar an' die? I war huntin' you to save you. I don't care fur this camp, so I kin get outen it with the sunflower of my heart. I'm goin', cap'n; do as you please."

"I'm going, too," was the response.

Stargold threw her arms around the scout's neck as he sprung away. She believed that he was going to carry her back to her own people and to safety.

Hardinge followed the scout, and not a word was uttered until the edge of the camp was reached.

Then it was that Hardinge uttered a cry, for he had fallen over a figure that lay at the door of one of the lodges.

"A dead Injun!" ejaculated Simon, stooping over the body for a moment. "The Terror has been hyar, an' that lately; the red-skin is hardly cold."

"How do you know?" asked Hardinge.

"There's a figure four on the Injun's forehead, an' the right ear is missin'—the demon's marks!"

"I'd like to see this secret slayer."

"Mebbe you will; but we can't hunt 'im up now," was the answer. "Over thar ar' the mountains."

The scout turned to fly forward again, but the whiz of an Indian arrow cleft the air and he dropped Stargold as he sprung back.

The next moment the night resounded with wild yells, and the discharge of fire-arms assailed the ear.

The Crows had fallen upon the Sioux camp!

"I'm goin' back an' help the Sioux," cried Ben Simon. "This ar' a Crow shaft. Look at the point an' the featherin'," and he held before Hardinge the arrow which he had drawn from the body of the Indian girl. "I'll pay 'em fur the shot! Go an' save yerself, cap'n. Yer day hezn't come yet. Ben Simon's hez."

The scout leaped toward the battle, and Hardinge and the stricken girl were alone.

"Hold a minute," said a voice, as he was about to fly. "I want to ask a question before I go over thar to take my reg'lar dose. Is the gal, yer niece, in the camp?"

"Cyrille?" cried Hardinge, amazed. "Who are you?"

"Sam Wildcat, left fur seed in the Powder River Valley. I hed the gal in my arms the other night; but the Sioux got her. The gal, yer niece, cap'n. What on airth ar' you lookin' at? Hev I turned catamount er alligator since I saw you last?"

"Cyrille alive and near me," cried Hardinge. "The girl in this village? Impossible! Sam, you will help me. We will go back and find her!"

"Back thar whar scalpin' is the programme? I've taken my reg'lar dose to-night—two Injuns raw. You kin go back ef yer want to, but old Sam Wildcat prefers to wait till the battle is

over. Thet other fellar is somewhar around, an' I hev no desire to meet 'im. I've found six dead Injuns in my travels to-night, an' thar ar' only six good ears among 'em. I say, cap'n—Great gunflints! look yonder!"

Hardinge turned and saw the head of a bear between him and the moon.

The next moment he saw the body.

"Good-by, cap'n. Sam Wildcat doesn't want an introduction," exclaimed the frontier rascal.

An instant later Wildcat was bounding away and Hardinge was not far behind him.

"Run! cowards, run!" cried a new voice. "I will not desert Cyrille at any rate. I have sworn to save her, and, despite the Secret Slayer's presence—despite the Indian battle raging over yonder, I will not turn my back on Red Cloud's village until I learn something about Cyrille."

The speaker rose from the ground in the shadow of a lodge near where the two men had stood.

It was Ned Temple, Cyrille's boy companion and lover.

CHAPTER VII.

TAKEN UNAWARES.

If he was treacherous, Ben Simon was no coward.

He had carried his life in his hands into too many "hostile" camps to show the white feather to a lot of Mountain Crows.

One thought maddened him above all others while he hastened to that part of Red Cloud's town where the two bands already engaged in deadly conflict, were struggling for the mastery.

Stargold had been slain in his arms, and that, too, by a Crow arrow. It was a stray barb, no doubt intended for the heart of a Sioux warrior, but, missing its first mark, it had found the fairest target in the Indian camp.

A few rapid bounds in as many minutes brought him to the field of battle, and putting himself at the head of the Sioux warriors with a revolver in each hand, he led a charge that turned the tide of war, and drove the mountain wolves, beaten and disorganized, from the field.

The raid had failed, but the victory had cost the Sioux dearly. Fifty of their warriors lay on the plain, and several women and children had been hit by stray arrows.

Simon, as a matter of course, came in for a large share of the praise bestowed on the victors; but he soon found an opportunity for withdrawing from the, to him, disgusting spectacle.

He ran back to the spot where he had left Stargold.

The beaten Crows had retreated in that direction, and what would heal their wounds quicker than the beautiful scalp of Red Cloud's child?

A howl of rage burst from the scout's throat when he reached the spot.

The body of his dusky love was missing!

For a moment Ben Simon stood bewildered at the place, staring at the ground.

"Twenty scalps fer ev'ry h'ar!" he suddenly exclaimed. "Death steps on yer trail, you mean Mountain Crows. Far'well, cap'n; take keer ov yerself. Far'well, Beverly; old Ben Simon hez

gone into the Crow-pickin' business. I'm a walkin' death from this night, a hull graveyard on wheels!"

The scout tightened his belt, and then darted away to disappear on the trail of the beaten Crows.

"Go back fer the boys? No! I'm goin' to make my own graveyard," he said. "The boys would only hinder me. The Crows will not go far. I'll find 'em somewhar along the old pass."

Nobody knew the war tactics of the Crows better than the man now on their track.

An hour later the figure of the scout leaned over a cliff, and he looked down upon a large body of Indians in the bottom of the ravine beneath.

Did his eyes glitter like a tiger's while he gazed with his eager fingers twitching uneasily at the triggers of his revolvers?

Suddenly a wild cry that almost betrayed him parted Ben Simon's lips.

A fire was burning in the ravine, and it revealed the rocky sides of the pass. Here and there a few bushes growing in the clefts of the rocks, cast grotesque shadows, but otherwise the light shone everywhere.

Ben Simon saw every Indian; he might have counted them if a certain figure had not suddenly stepped into view.

"Stargold, by my eyes!" he cried. "Why didn't I stay by the girl! Ben Simon, hev you forgotten that a Crow arrer doesn't always kill? Stargold wouldn't be down thar now ef you had stayed by her. She's not likely to become Mrs. Simon; she never will if you lie here like a fool an' let them mountain wolves do their worst."

Red Cloud's child stood beneath the scout, and in the midst of the Crow warriors!

She looked every inch an Indian queen, with her long hair and flashing eyes, and her faultless figure drawn to its true hight.

On every side were ranged the Crows, wild, half-naked men, armed with knives and ton-a-hawks. Not a few still bled from wounds received in the camp fight, and all smarted under the defeat.

Stargold was unbound, but helpless still.

"Let 'em open the ball!" hissed the scout, as his long arms went over the precipice and his deadly revolvers covered the fiends before the Sioux girl. "Jes' let 'em lift a hand ag'in' Stargold, an' death will start a graveyard in the old pass afore mornin'. Face the tigers, gal, an' never flinch. Look 'em in the eye, an' be what you war an hour ago—Red Cloud's queen! Tech 'er ef you dare, Mountain Crows; yes, jes' lift a finger ag'in' 'er!"

Ben Simon did not look behind him; his whole attention was directed to the scene in the mountain pass.

Therefore, he did not see the dark figure that had followed him cat-like up the mountain, the figure, which, half-hidden by a tree, appeared to be watching him with a pair of vengeful eyes.

The watcher had the shape and figure of Major Beverly; but what had brought that worthy into the midst of Siouxdom? We left him flying from Red Cloud's warriors along the banks of Powder River. He had abandoned Ned

Temple to his fate. Had he returned to hunt the boy down, and to rid the world of a rival for Cyrille's hand?

When Ben Simon's attention became fixed on Stargold and her captors the watcher crept from his tree, and, snake-like in his movements, again approached the scout. The scout heard nothing; the tread of a cinnamon would hardly have disturbed him.

The short grass aided Beverly; it gave forth no sound, and when he stopped again he might have touched Simon's feet with his revolver.

"Who can it be?" muttered Beverly. "It ain't the boy. I see that now. Is it Hardinge? Ah! I would like to meet that cowardly deserter somewhere among these mountain lands and tell him how he deserted Cyrille and left her to her fate somewhere between Buford and Reno. But I care not who he be—Hardinge, the boy or Wildcat. Here goes!"

As Beverly finished, he rose and threw up his pistol arm.

"Captain Hardinge!" he exclaimed.

The man on the ground leaped up with a cry, and Beverly started back.

"Oh! it is you, traitor!" he cried. "Thank Heaven we are alone!" and Beverly, seeming to forget that he carried leaden death in his hand, flung his revolver to the ground, and sprung like a tiger at the throat of the scout.

It was a bound which could not be resisted, and although Ben Simon struggled with the desperateness of despair, the man whom he had betrayed seemed to possess superhuman strength.

Beverly forced the pistols from the scout's hands, and then bore him to the very edge of the cliff. The pebbles broke loose beneath the traitor's feet, and still the hand of the cavalryman was at his throat.

"Down you go, villain!" hissed Beverly. "You've betrayed your last white man into the hands of the Sioux. There are two more left for Beverly's vengeance, which, as surely as death, shall overtake them. Now, go and join the army of dead traitors, headed by the chieftest of all—Arnold! And take with you the compliments of Frank Beverly."

A sudden push, a half-uttered oath, and Ben Simon was hurled from the bank.

Beverly did not lean forward to witness the doom of the traitor, for it was by a master effort that he kept himself safe; but he heard a wild Indian yell that almost froze his blood.

Indians below him!

"Heavens! I did not know that I was throwing the traitor down to his friends," he exclaimed. "Well, let them receive him as they have received him before—with open arms."

Ah! Ben Simon had not fallen among the Crows.

In his flight downward he had caught a clump of strong rock bushes in his hands, and was hanging suspended in the firelight over the chasm.

Well might the Indians start back and utter wild cries at the sight of a man hanging above them by a frail grasp on a few mountain bushes.

Stargold recognized Ben Simon in an instant.

"Save! save!" she cried, in her native tongue.

as she sprung forward; but the naked arms of the Crows dashed her back.

The next instant twenty elk-horn bows were bent, and as many deadly arrows, drawn to the barb, covered the body of the suspended scout.

"Shoot!" grated Ben Simon, looking down over his shoulder. "You've got Ben Simon whar you want 'im. To-morrer you may not hev 'im in sich good shape. Make hay while the sun shines, Mountain Crows!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DEATH SHADOW'S HATRED.

WE left Cyrille about to fall into the hands of the bear man who had rescued her from the hatchet of the survivor of the Indian duel.

Let us go back to the spot and follow her fortunes for a time.

When she fell fainting to the ground, the clawlike hand of the strange person was about to seize her, and the next moment his eyes were looking down upon her face.

The fiery flashes of vengeance had now left them, and where they had burned, the softer light of pity shone.

Cyrille was still unconscious when she was lifted from the ground, and borne away in the arms of her rescuer. When she recovered the little valley tenanted by the four dead Sioux had been left behind, and the bear-demon was slowly ascending a mountain by a narrow path that wound its way among the bushes.

The girl shuddered and shut her eyes when she saw the grotesque head of her captor.

As she suspected, her forced journey ended in a mountain cave, where she was placed once more on her feet. The man without a word kindled a fire on the floor of the cavern. He then spread a bear-skin on the ground to which he invited Cyrille by a gesture. The girl was fatigued and did not hesitate to accept the invitation.

"I wonder," thought Cyrille, "if he knows anything about Ned. When he comes back I will tell him my story."

The bear-man had vanished among the shadows of the cave and Cyrille was alone.

Suddenly the step of her captor startled her and she looked up.

The next minute a cry fell from her lips.

The shaggy head of the cinnamon no longer looked down upon her—but the face—the natural features of the Indian's Terror had been revealed. It was the face of an old man; the eyes still burned with great brilliancy and the closed lips were expressive of some master resolution. His hair was almost white.

"I am no longer a monster, girl," he said to Cyrille, as he sat down on the edge of the bear-skin. "Your pretty face has brought the past back—the past so strangely full of love and horror. Who are you? and how came you in these parts?"

Cyrille told her story of which the strange being did not lose a word.

"Now," said Cyrille, emboldened by his attention, "will you not tell me something about your life?"

"Me?" he exclaimed. "I am Vengeance—I am Death! Ask the Sioux who that shadow is that falls athwart their wigwams in the night,

and they will whisper Negotoo, the Death Shadow. I will not horrify you, girl, with the story of the night that made me the Indian's foe. You have lived in the Western forts all your life, and you have heard enough of such tales. You may have heard of my great grievance. "No! no! you were not born then, and it has passed from all living minds save mine. It was near the Missouri—near the hunting-grounds of the Sioux. I was not there. I came back after all was over—after the inmates of our twelve wagons, with their guard, had been killed and burned—yes, burned, girl, for the inhuman butchers had thrown the dead among the wagons, and upon all a dozen torches. Why was not I there when they came to destroy? Why did Captain Thornton send me out after game, and keep the best hunters in the camp? He knew the country; he had traversed it before; but it was new to me. It is not new now," and the man laughed strangely. "Every foot of Sioux land is known to me; every village, every camp that Red Cloud has pitched since that fatal night has witnessed the work of Negotoo."

"Your family were with the train?" said Cyrille.

"Yes, my wife and my child! I buried one, but the babe I never found. Somewhere among the burned wagons she had perished."

Cyrille shuddered.

"No!" suddenly continued the slayer, laying his hand on Cyrille's arm. "You are going to ask me who I am. Don't do so. It might make me remember that I am not Negotoo, the Death Shadow, and if I forget that, my hand might weaken for a moment. I am Negotoo and none other! I am no longer—"

He paused and caught himself in time. The name which he had not uttered for years was about to fall from his lips.

"You will stay here," he went on. "Myra would have looked like you if the death-eagles had not swooped upon the train—if her uncle had not sent me out to hunt. Well, he saved me for vengeance, and perhaps I ought to thank you, Captain Thornton. Thank you? no! no!" and the slayer sprung up like a madman. "You knew more than I thought you did; you knew what would be Myra's portion one of these days, if she lived. I wish the torch and the hatchet of the Sioux had spared you, Captain Thornton. I would give my right arm, ay, my life, if Heaven had but preserved you for my revenge. If I thought that you still lived, I would go to the end of the world to find your trail."

"Then," said Cyrille, deeply interested in the Slayers words, "Captain Thornton was a traitor. A traitor brought you here and a traitor, as I firmly believe, deserted me in the land of the Sioux."

Negotoo whirled upon her.

"His name?" he cried.

Cyrille hesitated. Why should she accuse her uncle Thornton Hardinge when she had no positive proof of his treachery?

"You will pardon me. I may have been too fast," she said.

"No; you would suspect nobody unjustly. Who is your traitor? Tell me, child?"

"My uncle, Captain Thornton Hardinge.

Since my desertion I have seen him with Red Cloud."

"That name again!" exclaimed the Slayer. "My traitor was Captain Thornton; yours Thornton Hardinge. Heavens! can it be—No! I am not to be favored thus. But go on. Describe this uncle of yours."

Cyrille did so.

"The same eyes, the same height, but not the same name," said Negotoo. "He was at Fort Reno?"

"Yes."

"I was never there. Since that terrible night the stars or the walls of this cave have covered me. I never enter the forts. My place is where Red Cloud builds his lodges, and where he marshals his scarlet devils. But let me ask you one question, girl. Where is your father?"

"At Fort Buford."

"His name?"

"Dudley Averill."

"What is his rank?"

"He holds none; he is the sutler of the post. But they call him captain."

"Dudley Averill?" repeated the bear man, springing suddenly back into the gloom of the cave.

Cyrille was nonplussed. Her father's name had been strangely repeated by the demon; it had affected him almost in the same manner that the mention of Thornton Hardinge's had.

When he reappeared the grinning head of the cinnamon was on his shoulders once more, and Cyrille started from the flash of the eyes beneath the hideous covering.

In one hand the Slayer held a piece of paper which looked like a leaf from a memorandum, and before our heroine recovered from her surprise the paper was thrust between her fingers.

"Read it when I am gone!" cried Negotoo, pointing to the paper. "And then stay till I come back. I am still Negotoo, but before I see you again I will be the man who carried his babe on his arms across the mountains, but still a heart-hunter and a blood-drinker. Stay here! To venture beyond this cave will be to perish by the hatchet of the Sioux, or the teeth of the mountain wolves. I will come back. Red Cloud's village lies in my way. I will pass through it like an angel of death, for far beyond it is a face that I must see."

He sprung away with the last word still on his lips, and Cyrille, staring at his strange figure, saw him vanish beyond the firelight.

Then her eyes fell to the paper in her hand.

It was covered with names written a long time ago, and many were hardly legible; but there were two which had been written over and over, as if the persons who bore them were objects of interest to the writer.

These names were "David Dudley" and "Captain Thornton."

"Merciful heavens! what do I see?" suddenly exclaimed Cyrille, staggering back while she clutched the paper.

"David Dudley was with the train that the Sioux attacked—the train that contained the Death Shadow's wife and child. What awful light is breaking before me? Those old letters that I found in father's room last summer were signed David Dudley, and when I asked

him what he meant he tore them from my hands and made me promise never to speak the name again! Then I am not an Averill, but a Dudley—the child of a man hated and hunted by a demon whose motto is ‘Vengeance and blood.’ Father, be on your guard. He is hunting you now. The blood-hunter of Montana has thrown himself upon your path; he will steal into Fort Buford like a thief in the night, and I—I am the one who showed him the trail which he deemed lost forever. Father! father! Heaven keep the child that betrayed you and cannot save.”

Cyrille darted forward with an agonizing cry, nor stopped until she stood at the mouth of the mountain cave.

The day was drawing to a close, and the sun no longer threw Cyrille’s shadow on the rocks.

The bear-demon of Montana had already passed out of sight, and strain her eyes as she might, our heroine could not see a single being.

But all at once a strange noise overhead startled her. It was the noise like the flapping of great wings. Shrinking back, Cyrille ventured to look up and saw the body of an eagle, the king of the skies, dart downward and strike heavily at her feet.

A moment later she noticed that the breast of the bird was pierced by an arrow which had passed entirely through the body so that she could see the barb and the feathered tip.

“Out of one peril into another!” gasped the girl. “The slayer of the eagle will hunt for his prey, and find me. No! I will turn robber. I will rob the Indian of his bird!” and picking up the cloud king Cyrille bore it back into the cave where she grasped a rifle left behind by Negotoo, and facing the entrance waited for the deadly marksman.

CHAPTER IX.

SAM WILDCAT’S REVENGE.

BEN SIMON was in no enviable position.

Suspended in mid-air, as it were, above the sharp points of a score of Indian arrows, he was nearer death’s doors than he had ever seen.

He felt his grasp on the bushes growing weaker and knew that if the crows withheld their shafts a few moments longer, he must of necessity relinquish his hold and fall among them.

“Shall I fall, or shall I hold on?” he asked himself. “Ben Simon, you ar’ in pickle now!”

“Hold on!” came a voice from overhead.

The scout looked up.

“Thet sounds like Sam Wildcat,” he said. “But what would he be helpin’ me fur?”

“I’ll hold on till the Injuns shoot. Then, ov course, I’ll hev to drap,” he answered.

A moment later, a lasso glided over the edge of the cliff, and the scout caught it eagerly with one hand.

A yell of rage broke from the throats of the Indians below, and as Simon was whisked upward by the unseen help, a dozen arrows left their bow-strings.

“Hit, by hokey!” cried Ben, as he landed on the firm ground above. “Who ar’ you, pards? Cap’n Hardinge, by my sculp! an’—Sam Wildcat!”

“No congraterlations, an’ no thanks,” said Wildcat, springing forward. “I hevn’t taken

my reg’lar dose to-night. I guess I’ll take it now.”

The next moment, two pistol-shots in rapid succession reverberated through the pass, and two Crow warriors staggered back, dead.

“I never take more’n two Injun pills,” coolly remarked the slayer, stepping back. “Now whar ar’ you goin’?”

The question was addressed to Ben Simon.

“Oh, I’m goin’ to foller the Crows an’ save my gal.”

“Whar is she?”

“Down thar. They shot ’er in my arms, as the cap’n knows, to-night, but they didn’t kill ’er. Stargold is now with them red skunks in the pass.”

During his speech, the pistol which Wildcat had put back into his belt after shooting the two Crows, was drawn again.

“So you’ve got a gal?” he said, addressing Simon. “Do you remember the Cheyenne beauty that made us enemies; the gal you took from me? What did I say then?”

Ben Simon’s eyes suddenly flashed.

“Ov course I know what you said,” he cried. “We ouldn’t settle the matter hyar. The Crows might take a notion to interrupt the tussle. Let’s go down the mountain. Thar’s a cave not a dozen miles off, whar we kin cut er shoot at each other’s hearts.”

“I didn’t say that I would fight you, Ben. You took my Injun beauty from me, an’ I’m goin’ to take yourn from you.”

Wildcat took a mad stride toward the edge of the cliff, Simon, with a tigerish roar, sprung after him. He held his bowie in his hand.

“Stand back!” cried Wildcat.

There was a threat in the command, but it fell against a rock.

The scout never stopped, but threw himself against Wildcat, who was braced for the assault.

The right hand of the would-be slayer of Stargold caught the descending arm and a moment later Ben Simon was hurled back.

“I’ll settle with you arter awhile,” said Wildcat, turning to the cliff again.

Simon fell at full length on the ground ten feet away, but hastily scrambled to his feet.

As he did so he heard the sharp report of a revolver, and saw the dark figure of Wildcat withdraw from the pass.

“She’s down thar—yer Injun beauty!” said Wildcat, coolly. “We’re even now. Now we’ll go to the cave an’ squar’ accounts.”

Ben Simon stood for a moment like a man bewildered before Sam Wildcat, then all at once the truth seemed to flash across his mind.

He sprung forward with a cry of horror and looked down into the pass for a moment.

What did he see?

A number of excited Indians rushing up and down the gulch seeking a path that would lead them to the enemies above, and a few bending over the sylph-like figure of his dusky sweetheart, Red Cloud’s daughter, shot by his old enemy, Wildcat.

A moment’s glance was enough for the traitor.

A mad yell broke from his throat as he turned.

"We'll fight here, Wildcat!" he roared, dashing at the figure that confronted him.

"Hold on! I'm not the man, Ben. Don't tear me up, for mercy's sake!"

Simon let go at the sound of the voice and started back.

He had seized upon Hardinge.

"Whar's Wildcat?"

"He has left."

An oath, a cry of baffled rage.

"Whar's his trail?"

"I don't know. I was watching you and not see him go."

"The skunk!" Then Simon shouted: "Sam Wildcat, you cowardly white-livered hound, I dare you back—I, old Ben Simon, a better man nor you dare be."

A wild laugh of derision came down the mountain.

Simon looked up, grated his teeth, and sent words of fierce defiance back.

"Not now; you can't taunt me enough to git me down," said Wildcat. "I'm engaged in other business jes' now; but I'll meet you anywhar next week an' settle accounts."

"Thet's a lie!" went up the mountain.

"Try me!" came back.

"Next Friday, then, at the cave on the Bald Top Mountain."

"I'll be thar!"

"An so will Ben Simon."

Wildcat did not reply. Somewhere overhead he was hastening away with the blood of Red Cloud's daughter on his hands.

A few minutes' search enabled Simon to recover the pistols which Major Beverly had snatched from his hands,

"We must not stav here," Hardinge said.

"Ov course not. Thar are two death trails for me to follow now."

"Two?"

"Yes. Sam Wildcat's is one, an' the major's is the other."

"The major?" exclaimed Hardinge.

"He's pushed me off—slipped up behind me while I war watchin' the Crows menace Star-gold, and over I went. I thought he had scooted back to Fetterman; but he's in these parts huntin' somebody. He left the post to find you, cap'n."

Hardinge uttered an oath.

"I helped him when he was Red Cloud's captive," the deserter said. "He is a man who never forgets favors. He may think, Ben, that Cyrille is somewhere around."

"Wal, what is the gal to him?"

"More than you think."

"But you don't want him to find her?"

"No! If the guides didn't do their duty—if they left Cyrille alive in this country, I hope that I may get them before my rifle. I paid them to do a certain thing. I ought to have given you the job in the first place, but never mind. You never had a girl to stand between you and wealth, happiness, and position?"

"Never, cap'n."

"Then you don't know anything about my position. Now I'm ready."

Ben Simon cast a last look over the edge of the cliff as he tightened his belt, and saying "Come on" to his companion, strode away.

The Crows did not pursue the three whites, but remained in the pass.

Daylight breaking over hill and valley saw Hardinge and Ben Simon emerging from a mountain forest.

The traitor had another man to betray.

Suddenly Simon halted and turned to his partner as he pointed downward.

A bluish smoke was rising above the treec-tops.

"A breakfast fire—Wildcat metbe!" said the scout, while his eyes flashed.

The twain now began to approach the spot, and after a good deal of crawling on all-fours their eyes beheld four Indians seated around what Ben Simon had called a "breakfast fire."

They were entirely unsuspicous for their rifles leaned against a tree near by; they were waiting for the bear-steaks on the coals to be roasted to their liking.

"We've got the villains!" suddenly cried Hardinge. "By Jove! this is a pleasure unexpected. Look at those two on the left of the fire! Did you ever see them before?"

"Ov course I hev—Black Robe and Uncapa."

"The two red scoundrels that went back on the agreement I made with them," hissed Hardinge. "Are you ready, Ben?"

"Ready fur what?"

"Why, to send a bullet into one while I take care of the other."

"An' miss a good chance ov knowin' fur sartain whar the gal is? I say, take the other two an' leave Black Robe an' Uncapa."

"A good idea! I did not think of it."

The repeating rifles of the twain were at their shoulders, and all at once two of the Indians sprung back from the fire and fell dead.

The two others leaped toward their rifles.

"Halt!" shouted Hardinge. "Touch a gun and we'll bullet bore you. We've got the dead drop on you. I want to hold a talk with you."

"He wants to kill you. I have the dead drop on him! Run for your lives, Uncapa and Black Robe. I'll kill the white man whose cheek drops to his rifle for aim."

Hardinge and the scout involuntarily turned their heads toward the speaker.

He was not far away, and the rifle that covered them was held above the tops of a clump of bushes.

Only half of the speaker's figure was visible.

"A boy, by Jove!" grated the deserter.

Yes, a boy—Ned Temple!

CHAPTER X.

RED ALLIES.

IT was a strange tableau.

The two Crows hesitated, and their gaze alternated between the rifles that covered their bodies and the boy who threatened the lives of Ben Simon and his comrade.

"Lower your rifles!" continued Ned. "Captain Hardinge, your rascality has already forfeited your life at my hands, and my finger itches to press the trigger it now touches. Those Indians, Uncapa and Black Robe, failed to do your bidding. I know now why they left Cyrille and I and refused to guide us to the gates of Fort Reno; they were afraid to face you after receiving pay for a deed which even

they had not the heart to commit. Now, sir, neither you nor your comrade, whom I recognize as the notorious Ben Simon shall shed a drop of their blood. Down with your rifles or die! This is the last command!"

"The brat hez got us, cap'n," whispered the scout. "He means bizness when he talks that way. Our time will come. Down go the shootin'-irons!" and Simon cast his weapon down.

Hardinge followed his example and sullenly faced the boy, whose eyes glittered with triumph.

"Now, sirs, about face! forward march!"

The two men turned; but twenty feet away they halted.

"On! on! I can kill at long range," were the boy's words that drove them forward again.

The two worthies did not halt again until they had passed beyond rifle-shot.

"Not another step, cap'n!" said the traitor scout halting. "I'll die hyar first."

Well might he be defiant now; the bullets of the boy could not reach him.

The two plotters did not know that they had walked the last fifty yards at the mercy of the rifles of the Crows, nor that they owed their continued existence to Ned whose uplifted hand had kept the red-skins' fingers from their triggers.

When they looked back they saw their young foe and the Indians together at the fire.

"The 're goin' to make a trail fer us," said the scout. "All we hev got to do to find the gal, is to foller them."

"And follow them we will and that to the death!" grated Hardinge, regarding the scene. "To the death mind you, Ben. The boy must die."

"I ginerally kill young wolves, when I catch 'em. They never grow to be old ones then."

"Who is that boy?"

"Don't I know 'im?" responded Simon, with a grin. "Why, he's Colonel Temple's second-hand boy; he war found freezin' in an emigrant's wagon a good many winters ago, somewhar near the Cheyenne bad lands. He's a rooster, he is; tripped me once at Buford, jes' fer fun, an' laid me up durin' the hull ov a buffler season with worse shoulder west ov the Missouri. Don't I love 'im, cap'n? Doesn't a grizzly love a mountain sheep?" and Simon's eyes flashed murderously while he spoke.

Meanwhile Ned and the Crows were together at the fire.

They were the braves who had guided Cyrille Averill and himself to within a few miles of Fort Reno, and then mysteriously left them to shift for themselves.

Our first chapter has already told of the remainder of that journey.

The Crows greeted Ned with outstretched hands.

"Where girl?" one asked and then quickly continued: "Big fort all burnt up; soldiers gone."

"Yes, Fort Reno's ruins greeted us, and Cyrille and I were separated there. Where Cyrille is just now I do not know."

"Girl lost? White man over there no get her. Him bad, too bad for Uncapa and Black Robe to do what him pay 'em for."

"Then you were to slay Cyrille?"
The two Indians nodded assent.

"Let me forget that Thornton Hardinge has such a heart as that in his breast. I hope I have met him for the last time. Should we meet again I may not grant him the mercy he received to-day. I am hunting for Cyrille now."

"The Crows will help white boy. The trails of Sioux land are to them the trails of their own country. They know 'em all."

"I accept your help," Ned replied. "I have been of service to you to-day; you may serve me."

"Good! We march against our foes first; then the girl."

The eyes of the Indians were darting looks of revenge and hatred toward the distant spectators of the conference.

"No; let them go for the present," the boy said. "Their trails will cross yours again, and I am satisfied that you will not have to wait long for that event either. Then I will not say no."

"Boy talk well, mebbe; but the snake that the Indian spares lives to bite again."

"I know it, but let them go now. Cyrille first. Help me and when our work is done, you may turn on the sneaking wolve."

The Indians acquiesced. "Now," said Ned eagerly, "do you know where Bald Top is?"

Black Robe uttered a light cry as he caught Ned's arm and pointed in a westerly direction his arm slightly elevated.

"Boy see blue mountain over there?"

"Yes."

"That Bald Top."

"Why, it is far away!"

"Git there by another sleep," was the answer.

Ned did not reply but gazed at the far-off mountain as if his hopes hovered around it.

"Why does boy look at Bald Top?" asked Uncapa.

"She is there!" exclaimed Ned, starting and his eyes brightened. "Last night I was in Red Cloud's village. I was there when the Crows attacked the Sioux among their own lodges. I saw Captain Hardinge and Sam Wildcat seek safety in flight. Then I thought that Cyrille was somewhere among the wigwams. While the battle was raging in one part of the camp I was gliding through another hunting for her. All at once I came upon the strangest creature that inhabits this country. I attempted to fly, but was captured by a bear-man who had just been stooping over a dead Sioux."

Ned's narrative was interrupted by an ejaculation from the Indians; their dark eyes dilated.

"I know you have heard of him," the youth said. "He is the Death Shadow of the Red Cloud's camps. Does he ever visit your villages?"

"Him never trails a Crow; always the Sioux," was the answer. "Boy see Death Shadow, last sleep?"

"Yes. He caught me and held me fast," Ned continued. "Suddenly the voice of a white man came from that funny, yet hideous head,

My name and my story were soon told at his command. I told him that my hunt for Cyrille had carried me to Red Cloud's camp. 'Go and find her,' he said to me. 'Go and find Bald Top; he will give you back the girl. She may need your help. Protect her till I come.' Then he turned me around, and pointed with his hairy arm over my shoulder. 'Keep in a straight line,' he said, 'and Bald Top will greet you.' I turned to ask for a better direction, for the arm had been withdrawn, but I was alone. The demon of Montana had disappeared, and I stood beside the dead Sioux. I believe that Cyrille is somewhere on that mountain; but there are many trails to mislead me. I am bound to find her. My duty is to do so and to punish. Now, 'On to Bald Top!' is my battle cry."

The two Crows had not understood all of Ned's narrative; but they grasped its main points.

"Bald Top shall give white girl up to boy," said Uncapa. "Then the Crows will trail the white snakes. Boy ready to go?"

"Not only ready, but eager."

Black Robe ran forward and picked up the rifles which Ben Simon and Hardinge had been forced to drop. He held them exultingly above his head a moment, in full view of the mad owners, and then suddenly dashed them against a tree.

A howl of rage burst from the scout's throat.

"Jes' what I thought the red skunks would do!" he cried. "Cap'n, we've got to get new shootin'-irons afore we kin complete with that party."

"Where will we find them?"

"Not nigher than the village."

Hardinge fairly groaned. He did not relish the thought of losing precious time.

"Thar ar' hosses fur us back thar," said Ben. "We kin soon make up lost minutes. We must have the rifles!"

"Then away to the Sioux camp!"

The two worthies turned their backs on the boy and his scarlet allies; but with renewed oaths to return to the trail again.

The tall figure of Uncapa led the van of the little party whose faces were now turned to Bald Top, the distant goal.

They did not see the lank figure gliding after them. It had the movements of the panther, and the greedy, flashing eyes of the wildcat.

When they halted, it stood still, and when they advanced, again it followed as before, a wolf on a trail destined to be bloody before many hours had passed.

"The youngster hed some news about my lost hollyhock of the mountains," said this tireless trailer, speaking to his ungainly self. "They're breakin' straight fur Bald Top, too. Didn't I hear old Uncapa mention the mountain once er twice in an important way. May I ketch the chicken-pox afore Christmas ef I didn't! Halt! Sam Wildcat! Thar's a short way to Bald Top. Hyar's the trail by which Colonel Armstrong marched over thar an' got licked. The Crows don't know about it. Sam Wildcat, you'll miss yer reg'lar dose to-day, but you're in luck. My mountain pansy, I'm comin' on legs thet kin outrun a rumor."

He bounded down a mountain defile like a stag,

leaving Ned and the Crows to press on over the trail they had selected to Bald Top.

Cyrille, wherever she was, had no one to warn her that more than one tiger was that day on her track.

CHAPTER XI.

CYRILLE'S PERIL.

"I AM waiting for nothing. The Indian does not know where his eagle dropped, and now that night has come again he will not continue his search."

Cyrille had waited, rifle in hand, three long hours for the eagle-slayer.

During that time her eyes had not left the entrance for a moment, nor had she ceased to listen for the footsteps of the foe.

At last she sat down to rest and to pay her respects to the food which Negotoo, the bear-man, had left behind.

While engaged in the latter occupation, she was suddenly alarmed by a sound near the corridor, and the next moment her rifle was ready for service.

"Is the eagle-slayer coming at last?" she asked herself. "Well, he will not find me unprepared."

She stepped beyond the limit of the firelight as she finished, and waited.

For a moment the startling sound was not repeated, then something more like shadow than substance greeted her eyes, and there rose into view near the inner threshold of the cave the lithe, half-naked body of an Indian.

Cyrille saw him plainly because he stood in the firelight.

The Indian stood for a minute where he first appeared, and then leaping suddenly forward, landed near the fire, and but a few feet from the rifle that now covered him.

He was alone and the bow grasped by his hand told Cyrille that he was the brave for whom she had waited.

"He will not see the eagle. I have thrown it away from the firelight. His eyes—"

All at once the Indian leaped to the left, and a cry of joy broke from his lips as he pounced upon the dead bird. It was this cry that broke Cyrille's sentence.

When the young brave came back to the fire he sat calmly down and began to examine the eagle. He drew the arrow through the body and returned it to his quiver; then he began to deprive the carcass of its finest feathers.

While thus engaged, Cyrille did not take her eyes from him.

Why did he exhibit such fearlessness in a strange cave where he had discovered a fire and his eagle? It is true that he was in the midst of his own country; but might not an enemy inhabit it?

Cyrille did not disturb him. When he had secured the feather he would quietly take his departure and leave her undisturbed.

She believed this when she saw him cast the plucked bird aside and quit the cave.

Our heroine breathed freely again.

"Thank Heaven! I was not compelled to shed blood," she said, and she was about to leave her station when a number of voices fell on her ears, and she shrunk back into the shadows again.

Her long residence at Fort Buford had familiarized her to a certain extent with the Sioux tongue.

"Cat Eye find his eagle here," she heard. "Fire burnin' when he come in. Nobody tell Cat Eye to go, so him sat down and took his feathers."

The eagle-killer was not alone this time as Cyrille soon saw, for when the last word fell from the young Sioux's lips a dozen stalwart bucks stood before her, staring at the fire.

"Somebody make fire; same person that find eagle," said one of the killer's companions.

"Him come back to cave by an' by. Mebbe him be Negotoo."

At the mention of the dreaded name the Indians involuntarily started back, and might have fled had not Cat Eye rallied them.

"Negotoo no man—him not flesh an' blood. Why then should he live in a cave?" said the buck. "We will hunt the hole that we have found—hunt it with fire."

Rallied by Cat Eye's words the Indians advanced again and several sprung to the fire to secure torches.

"They will find me now," thought Cyrille. "I have permitted safety to slip through my fingers. Cat Eye should not have been allowed to leave the cave alive."

The next moment a voice stern and strangely unlike a girl's came from that part of the cave which our heroine occupied:

"The Sioux have come to Negotoo's lodge! Do they want to wear his mark so badly that they must hunt him up?"

Instantly the savages who were about to lift the torches sprung back with startling cries, and Cyrille saw a fear-stricken group of warriors trying to penetrate the shadows that concealed her.

"Negotoo the Death Shadow is ready to make his mark on the Sioux warriors!" continued Cyrille in the same tone. "They want it; but let them come forward and stand for him in the firelight."

The braves stood a moment longer in the presence of the speaker, and then bounding back turned and fled!

All but one!

Standing erect as if planted in the stony floor of the cave, young Cat Eye, the eagle-slayer, dared to face the enemy.

He had drawn his tomahawk, and the flash of defiance was in his eye.

"Let Negotoo show himself. Here stands Cat Eye, the Sioux, who never shows his back to the foe—not even to the evil spirits. Black Coyote wears Negotoo's evil mark. He was Cat Eye's brother. Where is the night Spirit? It is afraid to meet the tomahawk of the Sioux warrior when he is awake."

"Negotoo does not want to slay the brave. Cat Eye's time has not come!" was the reply.

"Cat Eye says it must come. If Negotoo will not come forth, he will seek him."

The young Sioux strode forward.

Cyrille went back until the wall of the cave stopped her.

"Fool!" hissed Cyrille, and the next instant the Indian staggered from the jet of flame that leaped into his very face.

There was no death-cry; the victim of rashness fell and died instantly where he had lately hurled defiance into the teeth of his foe.

"One out of twelve!" murmured Cyrille. "Now, if the others have only left me to myself! I must ascertain."

She appeared once more in the firelight as she spoke and started toward the mouth of the cave.

Fatal move!

A number of vengeful cries fell on her ears, and several arrows whizzed past her head.

Instantly she retreated, but the spell had been broken; the Sioux were not contending with the death man Negotoo, but with a girl.

Cyrille turned, but too late; the red panthers were upon her.

In a minute all was over; her weapon was wrenched from her grasp, and shivered on the floor, and she stood in the midst of a pack of wolves—a lamb about to be torn to pieces.

A torch was held near her face that the Sioux might obtain a good view of their prize, and a series of mad cries broke from their throats.

Negotoo after all was not a spirit, but a young white girl. They had at last discovered the dread foe who for two years had killed in their villages and camps. Not a hideous being as they had imagined him, but a beautiful creature was this shadow of death.

"Negotoo will kill no more! She has made her last mark on the brow of a Sioux," flashed a stalwart warrior. "The eagle that Cat Eye killed led Red Cloud's young braves to the Slayer. Does Negotoo expect to kill any more?"

"Yes!" answered Cyrille. "Your camps and trails will continue to be visited by his hand!"

"After we have killed you?"

"After I am dead!"

The Sioux stared into each other's faces.

"Negotoo talk mad now."

"I am not Negotoo."

Several hands fell from Cyrille, but those of the spokesman of the band still held her.

"Girl lie!" he cried.

Cyrille's face reddened.

"I am not free. I am a prisoner," she said, indignant. "But I am not Negotoo. He may be behind you now."

More than one Indian turned toward the entrance expecting to see the figure of Death Shadow.

As for the positive brave, he held Cyrille in a vise-like grip.

Her words did not deceive him.

She and no one else was Negotoo The Slayer, for had she not lately spoken in the Terror's name?

"Negotoo is in the Long Viper's hands," he said. "She will never strike again."

The braves came back.

"Red Cloud has demanded that Negotoo, when captured by his braves, should be killed," continued the tall Sioux. "We have caught the killer, and the young brave Cat Eye lies at her feet. She shall die here in her own lodge."

Did the shout of savage approval that seemed to shake the roof of the cavern blanch Cyrille's cheek?

She was not allowed any time for reflection,

for as the fire burned anew under a fresh supply of fuel preparations for death began.

"All this came by your hands, Thornton Hardinge," broke from her heart. "May the blood that these Indians are about to shed bring a speedy justice to your door."

"What Negotoo say?" asked Long Viper.

"Nothing for you. Yes, yes; there is a white man who has betrayed his people—a soldier—who is among you now. He hates you; his heart is bound to your enemies, the Crows. If you don't slay him on sight woe to your tribe through his work."

"Negotoo means the white captain?"

"Yes; Captain Hardinge."

"Long Viper and his braves will not forget; they will split his heart with their arrows."

"Good!" cried Cyrille. "After all my avengers will be red ones, traitor!"

A minute later ten Indians who had been stooping around the fire stood erect once more, and Cyrille saw that each held a bow in his hands to which the slender death-arrow of the Sioux had been fixed.

Long Viper glanced at his companions and then led Cyrille toward the rear wall of the cave. It was now revealed by the fire.

Halting there he held our heroine out at arm's length and looked at the executioners bending their bows.

At that moment his grip was not tight.

"Heaven guide me!" ejaculated Cyrille in an undertone, as wrenching herself from Long Viper's hand she bounded into the gloom on her left. "Merciful Father! show me safety!"

There might be a wall there; she did not know; but none halted her, and she darted on. A wild cry that made the cavern ring greeted her escape. It lent new speed to her limbs, and with her hands before her and a prayer on her lips, she kept on with the scarlet tigers of Sioux land at her heels.

She had never explored Negotoo's home, and the dark way she was threading might lead to death.

CHAPTER XII.

A FATAL PARTNERSHIP.

IT was the night after the thrilling occurrences of the chapter just ended when a man appeared at the foot of Bald Top and tried to penetrate the forest of trees and bushes that covered the sides of the mountains.

He wore the well-known garb of the army scout, but there was something about him that proclaimed him a superior being to that person.

"This is Bald Top," he said; "but I am in the dark as deeply as I was before I heard that wild man utter a word. Maybe he instructed the boy in an undertone, but I think not; I know he did nothing of the kind. I am ahead of the youngster, at any rate. I am here to wrench Cyrille from him should he find her. Major Beverly, this is to be your battle-ground. All you have to do is to wait for the foe; he is bound to come."

The man, then, at the foot of Bald Top was Frank Beverly, whom we left leaving the cliff from which he had pushed the traitor scout, Ben Simon.

He was still hunting for Cyrille the lost; but

what had brought him to Bald Top? A word will explain.

In hastening from his last adventure he moved toward the Sioux village, and had the fortune to come suddenly upon Death Shadow and Ned Temple. By the veriest chance his presence escaped notice, and he heard the conversation that passed between the pair, and felt his heart leap into his throat when the bear-demon told Ned that he would find Cyrille somewhere on the mountain.

Then he hurried away. To beat the boy to the place, and to find Cyrille first was his heart's desire; but the wrong trail has misled him. When he found Bald Top night had again spread her vail over the face of nature. He stood at the foot of his goal and uttered the words just recorded.

He knew that his young rival could not be far away, for Negotoo's words would cause him to hasten to the mountain; but Beverly did not care to wait for him.

"We will have to meet and fight it out some time," he cried. "The boy fool! does he think that I am going to yield such a queen of beauty to him without a struggle?"

He no longer stood at the foot of the mountain, but was creeping up with no definite object in view. Perhaps he expected chance to reveal him Cyrille's hiding-place. Chance had several times befriended him in the hunt for her.

All at once Frank Beverly stopped.

"I'm missin' my reg'lar dose to-night," said a rough voice, the sound of which led his gaze to the speaker, who looked like a statue carved against the starry sky. "Wildcat, you're on Bald Top ahead ov the hounds; but you hevn't struck the fawn's trail yit."

Beverly started at the name that fell from the hunter's tongue.

Sam Wildcat! the man who had separated Ned and Cyrille—Sam Wildcat, whose promiscuous slaughter of Indians had caused the Government a great deal of trouble; and the man whose presence at any of the forts would have cost him his life.

Beverly had never been so near him before, and the thought of this lawless frontier wolf-hunting for Cyrille was enough to make him draw his revolver, which he noiselessly did.

"I'll go up an' look at the old cave; hevn't seen it fur five year—not since I took an overdose ov Injun in it, an' got laid up fur six weeks with lead in the lungs. The boy an' the Crows can't be fur behind me, an' I might take the trick by findin' the cave first. Never give up, Sam; the pansy ov the mountair ar' bound to be yourn!"

He passed by Beverly so closely that the soldier might have touched him; but he did not.

"So he knows where a certain cave is?" ejaculated the major. "He shall guide me to it, but I will enter alone. You shall never enter it, Sam Wildcat, for death is at your heels."

Beverly took care to creep without noise behind the outlaw, and more than once smiled at the thought that Wildcat was innocently guiding his worst enemy to the spot where the object of their mutual attention might be.

Wildcat suddenly turned to the right, and when Beverly reached the turning spot he saw

a narrow path which gave out evidences of late travel.

"I am on the trail at last!" he cried. "Cyrille, my love, I am nearer than you think."

He never took his eyes from Wildcat, and when that individual halted, the soldier saw that the cave had been reached.

"Wal, I'm hyar now fur my hollyhock," fell from Wildcat's lips.

At that moment the figure of Beverly sprung up scarcely ten feet away.

At the same time he cocked his revolver.

"Thunder! foller!" roared Wildcat, wheeling upon his trailer, and the major started back with a cry of astonishment.

"Yes, followed, Wildcat!" he exclaimed, recovering in a moment. "I am Frank Beverly. Our mission to Bald Top is the same; but you shall fail, while I am going to succeed. You have found the cave for me, and Cyrilie, I trust, for which service accept my thanks. From this hour I have no need of you. And then I owe the Government a service which I can perform while I help my own affairs. You are going to cash your last check now. Major Beverly is the indorser."

Wildcat knew what was coming, for the revolver rested on a level with his forehead.

"My last check, eh? You wouldn't hold back a minute, would you?" he said.

"No!" hissed Beverly, who had heard of Wildcat's many feats of agility. "Your time has come. No more Indian wars from you."

"An' no hollyhock fer Major Beverly!"

The last word ended like the short growl of the panther just before its leap, and at the same instant Sam Wildcat's figure dropped suddenly below Beverly's pistol, and then leaped at him.

The following second the report of a revolver reverberated among the defiles and forests of Bald Top, and Beverly, struck "below the belt" by Wildcat, would have been hurled from the path if an iron hand at his shoulder had not prevented.

"Sam Wildcat's last check, eh?" was hissed in his ear. "Somebody else will pass in his'n afore mornin'. So you want the pansy ov Bald Top—you, an' the boy, an' the cap'n, not to speak ov the individual called Samuel Wildcat, Esquire. What do you think ov yer chances jes' now? Wouldn't you sell all ov 'em at less than cost?"

Beverly did not reply. The sarcasm of the voice seemed to be intensified by the murderous flashing of the speaker's eyes.

"I ginerally give white men a fair show," continued Wildcat. "I always respected the service; b'longed to it myself once."

"You a soldier?" exclaimed Beverly. "What part of the service did you disgrace?"

"The Whisky Brigade," answered Wildcat, with a grin.

"Just as I suspected; but you were an honor to that department, not a disgrace."

Beverly, at his turn, was trying to be sarcastic.

"Arter I left the service, I turned avenger. The loss ov ten barrels ov as good whisky ez ever killed a soldier, made Sam Wildcat the Injun's foe, an' I take my reg'lar dose every day,

—two red-skins raw, an' when I kin git 'em, I wash 'em down with three or four wildcats. But let's git to bizness. I always give white men, an' 'specially members ov the service, a show. Hev you a knife?"

"Yes."

Beverly was released, and as he had been deprived of his revolver he instinctively drew his knife—a formidable bowie.

"The mountain pansy ar' in thet cave. I know it!" said Wildcat. "Ef you wipe me out you kin walk over my carcass, an' take her; but ef I manage to git the p'int ov my knife into your life chest, why I'll do the claimin'."

The two men were standing toe to toe before the cave's entrance.

For a moment the twain stood ready for the combat. They had lifted their knives, when a strange sound, very like a signal, came up the mountain. It was replied to from some point overhead.

"They're hyar—the rest ov 'em!" ejaculated Wildcat, starting slightly at the sounds.

"They?—who?"

"The boy an' the Injuns. They've pooled their issues. The man that wins in our tussle will hev to fight all three."

"Why can't we pool our issues?"

Wildcat gave Beverly a searching look.

"Honest, major?"

"I mean business. If they have leagued together why need we be enemies at the present time?"

Wildcat thrust forth his hand, and the major grasped it.

The duel was averted.

"Now fur the common enemy," said the Indian-slayer. "Thar ar' two Injuns, my reg'lar dose, an' the boy kin take the place ov the Wildcat dessart. Come, major."

The two entered the cave and glided down the corridor.

When Wildcat stopped, he said:

"We're in the big room now whar I took the overdose ov Injun five years ago. Hev you matches?"

Beverly felt in his pockets and produced several lucifers which he placed in Wildcat's hands.

The next moment a sharp crack announced the lighting of the matches.

Wildcat held the burning bunch over his head.

"It was my tightest rub," he said, going back to his fight in the cave, five years before. "I'll show you the hole thet saved me arter awhile. Now—"

The matches had flashed up suddenly and revealed for a second the couple's surroundings.

All at once exclamations of horror rung from the white men's throats, and both started back as the matches were dashed to the floor.

At the same time a dozen dark figures, revealed by the lucifers, sprung at Beverly and Wildcat, like wolves at the stag enticed into their trap.

They had walked deliberately into the very jaws of death, for the yells that filled the cavern were the yells of the bloodthirsty Sioux.

"I'll take my reg'lar dose right hyar!" said Wildcat, drawing his knife,

CHAPTER XIII.

BEN SIMON'S "INJUN TRIGGER."

"I BELIEVE it would be worth my life to show my face in the camp now. Why, only last night the young bucks were plotting against me, and, in all human probability, I would not be here if the Crows had not made the attack when they did."

Ben Simon and Hardinge were looking down upon the Sioux village from an elevated plateau and the latter was the speaker.

We left the twain on their way to Red Cloud's camp to procure new weapons with which to contend with Ned Temple and his Indian allies. Captain Hardinge's hesitation was natural.

The attack of the Crows had preserved his life, and he knew, too, that the man at his side had plotted with the young bucks.

"You are safe down there, Ben, but I am not," he went on. "You can get the guns and horses. Double pay will reward you."

"I'll try it, cap'n," was the answer.

Ben Simon left his companion and was soon gliding toward the Indian camp.

Hardinge watched him until he could no longer be seen, and then prepared to await his return.

The day was waning again, and the familiar forms of the Indian lodges faded gradually from the deserter's view.

Several hours passed away without bringing the traitor scout back.

At last the captain's impatience could be suppressed no longer.

"I was a fool to trust him," he cried. "He betrayed Beverly and plotted with the Indians against me. One is compelled to put up with strange bedfellows sometimes, and I had to accept him. But never mind; I'll cut loose from *you*, and that in a manner which will deprive the world of your further services. I play for high stakes—the girl Cyrille, and a bonanza. What is the news from the gold coast? What does that advertisement say?"

He answered his last question by drawing an old paper from an inner pocket. Unfolding it, he found a notice at the top of an obscure column; it made his eyes glisten, for it read as follows:

"WANTED—Proof that David Monterey and his family perished in the massacre of Travis's train, April 30th, 1863. Any person furnishing positive proof of their death to the undersigned will be liberally rewarded."

"HATCH & DARST, Attorneys,
"San Francisco, Cal."

"Proof? that is just what I want the lawyers to have," exclaimed Hardinge. "Dudley and I played the wrong card that day, sure. We wanted the baby; but now we know that there's no bonanza in her. I know all about this advertisement. After Cyrille, the bonanza goes to the next of kin, which is me. Curse the Crows! If they had kept their part of the bargain, I wouldn't be here, nor with my regiment either; but I'd have my fingers on the stakes. So you want proofs, my shrewd lawyers! Well, that's just what I'm hunting for now."

When Hardinge returned the paper to his pocket, a smile of victory wreathed his lips, but the next moment it disappeared. He had turn-

ed his eyes toward the Sioux camp again; but Ben Simon was not in sight.

"He's up to some treachery again," grated the captain. "Curse him! I'll cut loose from him now. I'll go down and help myself."

He left the plateau, and the camp from which he had lately shrunk with a shudder, he entered boldly, but on all fours, like the scout.

A rifle and a horse; these were what the plotter craved.

He crept toward the corral and saw the gaunt figure of the guard as he stood erect, entirely unsuspecting, and at his ease.

Hardinge had seen a good deal of frontier life; he had on several occasions entered hostile camps with the army scouts, on horse-stealing expeditions. Therefore, he knew how to approach the sentry.

The crawl of the mountain-cat was not more noiseless than the deserter's.

All at once he sprung at the guard from behind, and, throwing his arms about his neck, he drew him back before he could utter a sound.

Then the knife made short work of the brave, and the pick of horses was at his disposal.

Captain Hardinge was not long choosing, and having stood the guard against the tree of his sentry-post, he sprung upon the horse and galloped away. He had secured a rifle by his daring deed; the guard's weapon was now his.

"Now, Ben Simon, keep your distance!" he cried. "We've dissolved partnership. I am able to take care of myself, now."

Meanwhile, where was Ben Simon?

Hardinge had hot misjudged the scout.

He had visited the corral only a few minutes before the deserter and helped himself to one horse—not two—and that at the connivance of the guard. He had already obtained a rifle in the camp. No blood had been shed by him.

He could not live without betraying somebody, and as he guided his horse past the foot of the plateau where he had left Hardinge, he looked up to smile grimly, and to laugh at his latest trick.

"Thar's a gold mine in thet girl fur him," muttered Ben. "He wants to share with me; but I might ez well hev the hill vein. I wouldn't make the ~~hit~~ lutin' bonanza king that he would, for I'd be Ben Simon in the parlors, ez I am in the mountains; but I'd make things hum 'round Frisco an' New York. I guess I'll prospect a little on my own account an' see what's in the lead. The gal's a gold mine; I know it! Cap'n Hardinge wouldn't desert the service an' run the risk ov bein' caught an' shot unless he saw money enough ahead to keep his hide whole."

Such were the traitor scout's thoughts as he galloped past the plateau, leaving, as he thought, a duped man behind.

For two hours during that night he stopped and slept in the Sioux saddle that he occupied; then on again.

Daylight found him in a rough mountain pass—a gulch whose bed was a rocky road. The flushes of dawn were slowly dissipating the shadows.

"Thunder! somebody's behind me," exclaim-

ed Ben, and with a hasty glance over his shoulder he hugged the darkest wall and held his hat over his steed's nostrils.

Yes, some one was behind him; and a few moments later a horseman rode by.

Ben's heart almost stood still, and his eyes seemed ready to fly from his head when he recognized Hardinge.

"He isn't such a blamed fool, arter all," growled the scout. "He sailed in on his own hook, an' got hoss an' gun somewhar. Now he's cut loose from me, an' thinks he's playin' hob. Wal, he is—in a horn!"

As Hardinge, unsuspecting of the scout's presence, rode on, Ben's rifle slowly approached his shoulder. It was cocked and his finger touched the trigger.

"By George! I'll never git a better chance," muttered the traitor. "He's huntin' on his own hook, so am I; an' he might circumvent me if I let this opportunity slip. I've got a bead on his head now, an' the least techin' ov the trigger—Almighty Jupiter!"

Well might the scout thus exclaim, for a loud report had broken the ravine's stillness, and the man ahead had fallen forward on his horse's neck.

"I didn't mean to shoot. The trigger war one I never saw till last night," said Ben whiter than usual. "Confound it! that's the second man I've wiped out, in my time foolin' with strange triggers. Wal, I kin hunt on my own hook now, can't I? Mebbe, arter all, it war a lucky shot. I'll go and see."

He galloped toward his victim, but the sound of his approach caused Hardinge's steed to prick up his ears and start off.

The scout urged his horse on, but the animal ahead began to increase his gait until he seemed to fly over the ground.

Hardinge still hung on.

"Cuss 'im!" growled Simon. "I'll catch 'im when we git out ov the gulch."

But on the rolling lands, upon which the two horses debouched, the race soon became a one-sided affair.

Hardinge had the best horse, and with head erect and mane streaming in the morning wind, he bounded away, guided, if guided at all, by a dead hand.

Ben Simon gave up the chase, and springing upon the saddle, watched his victim disappear far away.

"The hoss couldn't shake 'im," he murmured. "Well, good-by, cap'n! I'll find the gold-mine an' toast my old feet in the best parlor in California. I didn't intend to tech the trigger; but I never beg a dead man's pardon."

Then he dropped back to his natural position on horseback, and looked as if he was already toasting his feet in a bonanza king's parlor.

CHAPTER XIV.

A WOLF'S LOVE-MAKING.

"STAN' up to the trough an' take yer swill, pard. The odds ar' ag'in' us. I tried it in this place five year ago an' came off second best. Ef this ar' to be Sam Wildcat's last dose ov Injun, it shell be the biggest one he ever took!"

Frank Beverly did not hear more than one-

half of these words. The Indians were already struggling with Wildcat in the gloom of the cave, and he distinctly heard the disgusting thud of the outlaw's bowie as it struck bone and muscle.

He was also attacked, but by a single Sioux whom he had the good fortune to hurl from him.

"So far, so good!" he thought. "They are overmatching Wildcat. I have been forgotten. Why can I not escape?"

Escape! Beverly sprung away as the thought took firm hold on him. He thought he knew where the entrance was, but during his brief struggle with the Indian he had turned around several times and this, with the gloom, would likely bother him.

"Ah! fortune surely favors me," he exclaimed, when he found the sounds of Wildcat's death-tussle growing fainter. "It has led me to the entrance. I will see the stars soon!"

But Beverly was doomed to disappointment. He went on and on with his hands in front of him, but no mountain air fanned his face, no stars greeted his vision.

He did not know that he was threading the same unknown corridor down which Cyrille had hastened the previous night.

"Where am I?" he cried, not a little bewildered. "I must be traversing some way that leads into the bowels of Bald Top, instead of to the outer air."

He stood in gloom that seemed palpable, and the stillness around him was the stillness of death.

The battle in the cave must have terminated, for he heard it not, although he listened with all his might. Could it be possible that he was too far away to hear the noise of the struggle?

"I dare not go back. I will go on; this corridor must lead to daylight."

He went on again, holding his hands before him. All at once they struck a hard surface like a wall of granite, and Beverly came to a halt.

"I am at the end of the corridor," he said. "I can go no further. Were the Sioux to follow I would have to die here, and that like a dog, in sight of the richest bone he ever scented."

For a moment the major's situation overwhelmed him completely; if one could have seen his face at that moment, one would have started at the expression of rage and despair that covered it.

"Must I go back! Hark! what was that? Come on, mountain wolves! I am here—here to die like a soldier and a man."

With a revolver in each hand, and braced by the wall that had barred his further progress, the soldier tried to pierce the darkness and discern the figures of his foes. A sound like a footstep had surely startled him; it told him that some one was near.

"You need not keep back. I am here," he said, audibly, for he was burning with impatience. "I ran from you a few minutes ago; but now I am here to die, but not alone!"

The last word had scarcely left Beverly's lips, when he felt the impress of a hand on his arm. He turned like a person stung by a viper.

"You are white," said a voice that instantly drove his heart into his throat. "You are not

Thornton Hardinge, for your voice is not his. That is all I want to know. You are my friend for I fled from the Sioux wolves last night, and the dark rooms of this wonderful cave have hid me. Ah! I did not expect to find a friend here."

"I am your friend!" cried Beverly, grasping a hand in the dark. "I will stand between you and all the fiends of Sioux land. Fear not; no harm shall reach you while Major Beverly lives."

A light cry of mingled amazement and disappointment greeted the mention of his name.

"Major Beverly, what brought you into this country?" said Cyrille, for, as the reader has guessed, the person at Beverly's side was our heroine.

"Duty!" answered the soldier quickly, and then he continued: "Oh, Cyrille! Cyrille! since I have found you that duty will keep me near you to defend you against every foe."

"Thanks," breathed Cyrille. "But, will you not come to the spot where, since last night, I have lived in constant fear like the deer that seeks refuge in a thicket within hearing of the hunter's horn?"

"Since last night? Poor girl! you must be near starvation's door."

"You shall see," was the answer.

The hand of Cyrille guided Beverly from the spot. The touch thrilled him. He had found the beautiful girl whom he swore to make his wife despite every opposition, and he was already resolving that he would not leave her side until the ceremony had been performed!

"We are going up now," said Cyrille. "The interior of Bald Top is a perfect honeycomb of caves. Fortune surely guided me last night and you to-night. Look! Major Beverly, what do you think of my parlor?"

The young girl asked the question as she led the soldier into a cave, lit by a fire that burned on the floor.

Beverly expressed astonishment at the sight.

"I know what you are thinking about," Cyrille remarked, looking into his face. "No, my fire will not betray us. It cannot be seen from the corridors below. I have investigated this matter. The dry wood and bark awaited me here. All I had to do was to gather them together and apply a match."

"A match, Cyrille? What good fortune placed such wealth into your hands?" cried Beverly.

"Ah! it was fortune, indeed. When I fled from the Indians whose bows were already bent for me, I ran against yon deerskin bag that hung from a peg or nail in the wall, and it fell over my head and clung to me. I could not shake it off, for I thought only of escape, for the savages were behind me. When I reached this place, panting like a chased doe, I blessed Heaven for the accident that knocked the bag upon me. In it were life and light—a few pieces of pemmican and two old lucifer matches. On the first I have subsisted, and the fire has cheered me, for to live here in darkness would be to go mad."

"I believe it," said Beverly. "But tell me how you came to encounter the Indians."

Cyrille did not hesitate, and Beverly listened

to her adventures since her departure from Fort Buford, guarded by Ned Temple and the two Crows.

Only one thing she kept back; the bear-demon's story, and his departure, as she supposed, for Buford to slay her father.

Beverly watched her carefully while she spoke of Ned. Her beautiful face was in the firelight, and he could catch its every expression.

His scrutiny seemed to afford encouragement.

"I cannot think that he is dead. He was a brave boy—brave to rashness. We will meet again. Do you not think so, Major Beverly?"

"I do not know. Life is not safe in this wild country. You have other friends besides that boy."

"Oh, yes; but I do not want to lose him. His friendship has been tried, and—"

"You have never put Major Beverly's devotion to the test," interrupted the officer.

Cyrille gave him a look of inquiry.

"You do not understand me," continued Beverly, flushing. "You seem to put more reliance in the friendship of a boy than may be just. If he has escaped with his life, might he not be hastening back to Buford anxious to place himself behind its stockades?"

Cyrille colored.

"I fear you do not know Ned Temple," she said, repressing no little indignation.

"I know many of those youths who have become the officers' *protégés*," replied Beverly with a light laugh. "They are all alike, Cyrille. You must find stancher friends if you wish protection in the hour of peril, and stronger arms than a boy's."

Beverly was standing before Cyrille, and with the last word, he took a hasty stride that landed him on her side of the fire.

"Cyrille, the protecting arm is here!" he cried. "It belongs to Frank Beverly, and the heart that nerves it is not a boy's, but a soldier's—a strong man's. I have loved you long; nightly I have seen you from the barrack cot, or the saddle of the plains. You will listen to me now; you will not reject the love that comes to you in the hour of danger, nor the arm that is held between you and the knives of Red Cloud's braves. Say the word that I have waited to hear, Cyrille; say that you will become the bride of Frank Beverly, and—"

He was interrupted by the exclamation of surprise that fell from Cyrille's tongue as she drew back.

"I cannot!" she said. "Major Beverly, the truth must be told even though I lose the protection you offer. You ask too much. I cannot become your wife."

Beverly with difficulty suppressed the oath that struggled to his lips. His eyes flashed like sparks of electric fire.

"What prevents? that boy?" he cried. "Cyrille, you do not know what you lose when you reject Frank Beverly's love. The arm that offered you protection is strong enough to dash all opposition from its path. Think again."

"I need not think. Shall I repeat my answer?"

Beverly's brow darkened.

"You reject me because that boy lives; but I am not the man who will be thus outwitted."

Frank Beverly always wins when hearts are at stake. I did not turn from my path of duty and imperil my life among the death-paths of Sioux land for nothing. You were the prize that led me on and on, and now that I have found you, let me say, Cyrille, that you shall become my wife."

He had leaped forward like a tiger, and his hand would have seized the young girl's wrist if she had not sprung back.

"You are near enough!" she exclaimed. "Major Beverly, the arm you have offered shall never protect me. I spurn its protection! Better death here than life with one who makes love like a tiger. See! I am not defenseless. There was something in fortune's purse besides pemmican and matches. Now, sir, touch me if you dare!"

Cyrille, drawn to her full height in the light of the fire, looked more beautiful than ever. Her eyes flashed like an insulted queen's, and in the right hand that she held aloft was a long-bladed hunting-knife, rusty, but with a needle's point.

Beverly stopped, and inwardly cursed the girl who held him at bay.

CHAPTER XV.

A SHORT-LIVED TRIUMPH.

THE next minute Beverly was inclined to laugh.

"By Jove! my love-making has reached the point of a bowie," he said to himself. "I did not expect to find the girl so stubborn, and I must look for opposition as long as that boy stands in my path. Why did I not throw him into the grass, dead, when I had him in my power? I see now that I was a fool then. Give me another chance at him, Fortune, and if I leave a living rival in my road, then may I be shot by the squad!"

Cyrille still faced him, the flashing of her eyes not abated in the least.

They still said: "Touch me if you dare!"

"Well," suddenly cried the major, "since you threaten your best friend, Cyrille, I see no reason why the arm that has offered to protect you should not be withdrawn. I am going. We may meet again."

Cyrille seemed to start.

He was going to leave her; then she would be alone and helpless again in the subterranean recesses of the mountain.

The knife dropped at her side, as if all power to hold it up had suddenly left her arm.

"Because I refuse your offer of love you desert me?" she said.

"I do not see why I should defend with my life a woman who is to marry my enemy," was the reply.

"Then you and Ned are enemies?"

"The boy and Major Frank Beverly cannot be friends, that is certain."

"Then, sir, you can go! I will stay here until true protection comes, or seek it myself!" exclaimed Cyrille, stepping forward. "Frank Beverly, there was a dark threat but half concealed in your last sentence. Now I do not ask protection from the arm that will not hesitate to strike a rival in the dark. You can go, sir."

The soldier shrunk away; but at the threshold

of the cave he paused and turned a face full of threatenings upon Cyrille.

"I will come again, my beauty, and in triumph, too. I leave you now to strike a trail which I shall follow to victory. If you think that I relinquish all claims to your hand, banish such thoughts at once. I win or die! Good-by, my white tigress."

Cyrille's answer was a look of scorn, and the next moment he had passed beyond the line of light.

Let us follow him.

The corridor which he soon reached was the one down which he had fled from the Sioux in the main cave. It was dark as midnight, but by keeping a hand on one of the walls he guided himself along.

At length he began to use caution and advanced slowly. He was near the great cavern, Sam Wildcat's last battle-field. He was anxious to know the result of that terrible struggle in the dark, although he secretly believed that it could have but one ending.

Of course the desperado had been overpowered and killed.

When Beverly felt the corridor suddenly end, he dropped to the ground and listened.

Not a sound reached his ears, and the darkness before him seemed palpable.

He remembered how silent the cave had been an hour before, when in fact it was filled with Indians, and as that same ominous silence again reigned, he regarded it with just suspicions."

He waited and listened in the dark until inaction became unendurable.

"If they are there, death hems me in," he said finally. "If they have departed, I am a fool for staying here."

Drawing his knife and putting the blade between his teeth, while he carried his revolvers ready for instant use, Beverly crept forward once more.

He held his breath as he crept over the floor of the cavern inch by inch.

All at once his hand slipped along the ground. Beverly shuddered. He had struck a pool of blood; it might be Wildcat's!

A little further on a like occurrence took place, but this time the soldier did not shudder.

"They found a tiger in Sam Wildcat," he said to himself. "I thank fortune that I showed the red dogs the soles of my boots."

He went on.

At last he felt the cool night air, and the next minute he stood erect in the starlight that revealed the mouth of the cave.

He had run the gantlet in safety, and he was now ready for the new trail upon which the love of Cyrille had thrown him.

"It cannot be that Wildcat drove the Indians off," he said, his mind going back to the fight in the cavern. "I am confident that they are not here, for once or twice while I was creeping across the cave I made sufficient noise to have betrayed me."

"Well, Sam Wildcat, I have no further use for you. Our partnership would not have lasted long, anyhow; we would have fought for Cyrille—that is, we would be lunging at each other's heart, ere this. So peace to your soul, Sam, and thanks to the red wolves that slit your throat."

Beverly would have returned to the cavern for the purpose of examining the battle-field with a few lucifers if a startling sound had not reached his ears.

It came down the side of Bald Top, and told him that some person was above him.

"More Indians!" he ejaculated. "They have not gone far."

He stepped back, and with his figure half-hidden in the mouth of the corridor, he cocked his revolvers and looked up.

Confident that the noise overhead was occasioned by the Sioux that had lately left the cavern, the officer prepared to meet them, for certain sounds told him that more than one person was approaching.

"Cave near. Black Robe find it soon," said a voice.

"Black Robe?" echoed Beverly, starting. "That is the name of a Crow scout once attached to the service. Is he, too, on Cyrille's trail? By Jove! everybody seems to be hunting her."

Just then the figure of an Indian glided snake-like into view, and Beverly immediately covered it with his revolver.

"If it wasn't for the report I'd settle your hash," he hissed. "But creep a little nearer and let me get a squint at your face."

As if his words had been heard, the Indian overhead stooped, and the next moment cleared the distance between him and the revolver and landed with a grunt on the hard ground in front of the major.

At the same time a singular cry, undoubtedly a signal, fell from his lips.

Beverly heard it echoing up and down the sides of Bald Top.

"Boy an' Uncapa bear that, an' come. Black Robe find the big hole in Bald Top," said the Indian aloud.

The boy? Of course he meant Ned Temple. Beverly's heart seemed to stand still.

"So my rival has formed a partnership with you and Uncapa, eh?" he grated, glaring at the unsuspecting Crow. "Unions seem to be the order of the day in this part of the world. One was broken awhile ago, and now I'll fracture another."

The next second Frank Beverly left the rock with a tigerish spring, and before the Indian was aware of his presence he fell upon him with a mad hand at his throat.

Black Robe, taken by surprise, glared for a moment into the face of his antagonists as he was borne back.

"Death has caught you fairly, Indian hound!" hissed Beverly, and the knife that glittered for a moment in the starlight disappeared beneath the Crow's painted breast.

A groan fell from the unlucky warrior's lips, and as Beverly released him, he fell back to roll down the mountain-side while the death gurgle rattled in his throat.

"One!" said the soldier in triumph. "I'll go back and wait for the others. Fortune is bringing the boy into my hands."

Again he occupied his old position at the mouth of the cavern ready for Black Robe's companions.

"Maybe they did not hear the signal," he said at last, "and I cannot imitate it. I wish I

could call the boy into my clutches. Then I would have a walk over the track to Cyrille's heart. Ha! what was that?"

Voice, low and eager ones, were approaching.

Beverly put up the knife and drew the revolvers. Then he strained his eyes to catch a glimpse of Ned Temple and his companion.

The boy and Uncapa were creeping forward, nearer Cyrille than they suspected, nearer death, too, than they dreamed.

"Halt," suddenly rung out on the night air. "I've got the dead drop on both of you. If you wonder where your comrade is you'll find him down the mountain a little way with no blood in his heart. This is my night, Ned Temple; you've had yours!"

The figures creeping along the mountain path had leaped up.

"Major Beverly!" exclaimed the boy, recognizing his rival as much by his voice as by his face and figure. "We are not foes."

"Put another foot forward and discover?" hissed the soldier. "Our trails are the same, and yet we are not enemies! How do you make that out? We cannot divide the diamond we are hunting. It must belong to one person, and I swear that it shall belong to me! Ah! you understand now."

"Yes. You flung me from you when I told you that Cyrille was my betrothed," the boy said.

"By some fortune you escaped Red Cloud's eyes," replied Beverly. "Now we'll settle our love affairs here. Frank Beverly is not going back to his command, beaten by a boy."

"Then shoot, murderer! You dare not give Ned Temple a chance for his life."

"But I'll give you one afore the last dose ov Injun settles me furever!" came in gruff tones from below, and, before Beverly could catch a glimpse of the speaker, a revolver spoke and he staggered from his position with a sharp cry of pain.

"Now go in an' possess the land, youngster," said the same voice. "I wouldn't hav helped you ef my karkiss war whole; but I've taken an overdose ov Injun, an' death ar' cashin' Sam Wildcat's last check."

Ned Temple did not enter the cave whose entrance lay before him, but hastened to the speaker's side.

Propped up by a tree was the gaunt body of Wildcat, his face bleeding from a score of knife-cuts, and his clothes clinging by shreds to his figure.

"It war a terrible tussle," he said, greeting Ned and Uncapa, "an' you could hardly tell who came out first best. It war the biggest dose ov red-skin I ever took. They carried off enough to start a graveyard—a bigger, but not a better one than I came hyar to start with my old karkiss. You are the boy what my last victim war cussin' afore the fight. You want the Hollybok by the mountain, eh? Wal, she's up thar somewhar. Go up an' take 'er."

The next minute Sam Wildcat started from the tree and pitched headlong down the side of Bald Top, to fall heavily on his face like a death-struck man.

"Stay, boy," said Uncapa, grasping Ned's

arm. "White man dead. We no help him now."

"That is so," was the response. "His last act was a good one. Cyrille is near," he said. Of course she is in the cave. Let us go up, Uncapa, and rescue her."

The Crow nodded, and Ned dashed eagerly forward to find his fair companion.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SHOULDER AND NOT A HEART.

We have seen now, when in the act of ridding the world of the young lover who stood between him and Cyrille Averill's affection, an unexpected shot from Sam Wildcat's revolver sent Major Beverly staggering from the scene of his triumph.

Vainly he caught at the bushes through which he fell; he rolled a long way down the mountain side before he stopped.

Excruciating pains shot through his body, and although he ground his teeth that he might bear them in silence, at times, he was almost compelled to cry out. And to cry out would be to tell the outlaw and Ned Temple that he was still alive.

Therefore, he lay perfectly still, bearing his sufferings without a groan until he felt that an hour or so had passed away.

Above him everything was still.

"The boy and his red ally have found Cyrille, for did not Wildcat tell them that she was near? They would at once believe her to be in the cave, and she would quit her hiding-place at sound of his accursed voice."

The thought was gall to the man who, though a brave soldier, had left the path of duty to risk his life for the sweet face that had infatuated him.

"I want to live over this dastardly wound for vengeance, more than for love!" he went on. "Wildcat is dead; but he still lives—the boy who will win and possess if I do not interfere. I will live! By the gods! I will not perish here and be marked on the rolls as a deserter. No! I will go back to the command, victor, with a wife, and vengeance-sated."

He then examined his wound.

Thanks to the uncertain light the bullet intended for his heart had crashed through his shoulder; he had been wounded worse before by a Sioux arrow, and when he had examined his hurt a smile of mingled hope and joy passed over his face.

Despite the thousand arrows of pain that shot through him at the slightest movement, Beverly got upon his feet.

"I must have weapons if I would hunt and slay," he said. "Weapons first, rest, if I need any, afterward. Wildcat is surely dead. I heard his last words and his headlong fall when the monster overcame him. I will rob him."

He knew that the outlaw could not be far away and dragged himself toward the spot where he expected to find him.

More than once he stopped to grit his teeth against the pain of Wildcat's bullet wound, and then crept on again.

Suddenly he halted and looked at a lot of bushes that lay on the ground as if some heavy boot falling on them had borne them down.

It was where Wildcat fell.

From the spot a distinct trail led, not down the mountain, but gradually up a path like a wounded snake would make only it was much broader.

"The demon isn't dead yet," muttered Beverly, as he followed the strange path. "Is he a man of a thousand lives? I'd give a year's pay to hold one of his revolvers against his head, or the point of my knife at his throat."

Any eye could have seen that the trail was that of a desperately wounded man. Beverly saw how he had relied on bushes to lift him to higher ground and how he had braced himself when he stopped to rest.

For many minutes the wounded followed the wounded. Beverly's knife, tarnished by the blood of Black Robe's veins, was in his hand ready to answer to the leap of revenge which he momentarily expected to have at Wildcat.

The trail led to the cave and there Beverly halted.

He mechanically shrunk from its gloom.

Somewhere inside, he imagined, a dying man, as desperate as a wounded grizzly, was waiting him. He knew the piercing eyes that had glistened over Wildcat's brown cheeks. They might be watching for him.

For half an hour the soldier listened at the mouth of the cavern. He hoped that some event would occur that would tell him that the man who carried the deadliest revolvers in Montana was no more. But he was disappointed.

Armed only with his knife, he at last reluctantly crept away.

Cyrille was in the cave no longer.

Ned Temple and Uncapa had undoubtedly found her. Indeed, he soon had convincing evidence of this, for in a soft spot of ground, not far from the cave, he found the print of a girlish foot alongside of a moccasin's.

Cyrille was escaping him!

The thought was madness; it out-pained his wound.

Like the sleuth-hound he followed the trail thus accidentally discovered; but at the brink of a little stream that kissed the base of Bald Top he suddenly lost it.

In vain his search for Cyrille's track and at last he gave it up and resolved to wait for day.

Time never passed slower to the outwitted cavalryman. A thousand times he looked eastward to greet the first flushes of morning, and when they at last met his gaze he sprung up with a cry of joy.

But what else did he see?

A dark speck was moving along the rim of the far-off horizon.

"Indians! always Indians!" he groaned, keeping his eyes fixed on the unwelcome sight. "Are they to find me here and balk me in the end? I will turn Sioux as other white men before me have done. I will sell my soul for a blow at Ned Temple's heart."

The dark object grew more distinct as the morning advanced. It was approaching Bald Top, and rapidly, too. Beverly who had risen on his knees saw that it was a horse carrying a man.

"Who knows that the animal may not carry me back?" he said, a smile of eagerness crossing his face.

For some minutes the horseman disappeared. A part of Bald Top's forest was between him and Beverly.

All at once the soldier started back.

The horseman had reappeared, and so near that he could distinguish his features. He was at the foot of the mountain, which he was inspecting with upturned face.

"Ben Simon!" fell from Beverly's lips, as he stared at the person. "Is he a cat, like Sam, that he cannot be killed? I flung him over a cliff among a lot of Indians, and now here he is alive and hunting something. Oh, he seeks what we all want, the Mountain Lily. I've got another tiger to fight, I expect."

The man before Beverly was Ben Simon, who had betrayed every man with whom he had dealt.

Treachery was a second nature with him, and Beverly, as he looked and inwardly cursed him, wondered who his next victim would be.

The long grass and the stunted trees that grew where Beverly had ensconced himself, shielded him from the traitor-scout's piercing eyes.

When Simon moved forward again, Beverly watched him. The horse slowly ascended the sides of the mountain.

"He is hunting the cave. He will enter it on foot, for it will not admit a horse. Ha! fortune has brought me a steed. Frank Beverly, you are still in luck!"

Beverly went up the mountain again, but took care that the sweeping glances of Simon did not fall upon him.

The bridle-path traversed by the army scout led to the Death Shadow's cave, and Beverly saw him dismount, and with the rein in one hand lean forward and peer into the dark retreat.

Ben Simon's mission was no longer in doubt. He, too, wanted Cyrille, not to make her his wife, but that he might "toast his feet at the best parlor fire in California!"

Beverly saw him throw the lines over a bush, and with drawn knife disappear beyond the entrance.

What if Sam Wildcat still lived? If life had not left his gashed anatomy, Simon's invasion of the old cavern would be followed by the most terrible of combats, for more than once in camp Beverly had heard the scout relate the story of the Cheyenne maiden, and how he had taken her from Wildcat.

As soon after the traitor's disappearance as he found it practicable, the soldier glided forward. The horse was at his service; he had but to seize the bridle, throw himself into the saddle and dash away.

"Stay in there and get killed," he muttered. "Sam Wildcat, if you live, just put in one blow for Frank Beverly, the man Ben Simon sold, body and breeches, to Red Cloud and his wolves."

He reached the horse, and was jerking the bridle from the bushes, when a volley of oaths fell upon his ears, and the next instant two human beings shot from the cave.

They were locked together like battling tigers, and each throat was held by a hand that always grasped to kill!

"He stirred the dying tiger—Ben Simon did!" cried Beverly. "Hold on to each other's wind-pipe, dogs! It isn't my muss this time,

Gods! they're tearing one another's throat like wolves."

It was truly a tussle between Titans, and as Beverly looked he saw them lose their footing and pitch headlong down the steep side of Bald Top, fighting as desperately as ever.

Then he vaulted into the saddle that fortune had brought to his door, and shot down the narrow path as fast as hoofs could carry him.

"Now, my boy, escape me if you can!" he exclaimed. "And you, too, my Western lily, do not dream that you have seen Frank Beverly for the last time."

His unexpected success made him forget his wound, and when he reached the foot of the mountain he looked up triumphantly.

All at once a faint cry came down to him. It sounded like the echo of a yell of victory.

But which Titan had triumphed—Ben Simon or Wildcat?

CHAPTER XVII.

THE AVENGER'S WORK.

ON the evening of the sixth day following the last scene recorded in the foregoing chapter, a man whose only head-covering was a large handkerchief, appeared mounted on an Indian horse on the summit of a hill that overlooked the picturesque Powder River valley.

Suffering had given him a haggard appearance, and he looked like the survivor of some great massacre, or a fugitive from justice. His arms consisted of a repeating rifle and a knife, the latter stuck into a belt in such a manner that its wolfish blade was visible from hilt to point.

The fiery rays of the sun dazzled his eyes so that he had to shade them with one of his hands while he looked westward.

He did not think that it was the last sunlight he would ever see.

The man was Thornton Hardinge, the victim of Ben Simon's "Injun" trigger, as we have already seen.

His horse had carried him, while unconscious, into strange places and along mysterious paths. The delirium of two days had left him weak and almost crazed, but he still thirsted after the track he had followed for gain, and while he remained on the hill, the word Cyrille more than once passed his lips.

Fort Buford was not far away, but dared he, a deserter, enter it? He must see a certain person there—David Dudley, Cyrille's supposed father; but Hardinge well knew that the post sutler bore no such relation to the fair girl.

"While I push forward I leave the girl behind for others to rescue," he said. "But I cannot do all the work. He will keep me if I share with him, and share I will until I catch him napping. Then—then, Mr. Dudley, we'll dissolve partnership. I wish he was here now; but I must leave Cyrille another day's gallop behind me, and the Frisco lawyers must wait a little longer for the proofs."

Hardinge had scarcely ceased speaking when three horsemen came in sight by turning the base of another hill not very far away. He had no idea of their proximity, and started visibly when they burst upon his view.

"Indians! and Crows!" he exclaimed. "But who is the third party? a white man by my

heart!" and as he leaned forward and indulged in a more searching scrutiny, his eyes flashed with satisfaction. "Think of the devil and he appears," Hardinge continued. "I had but to mention Dudley and here he is. Now we can hunt, and slay and grasp together. And his Indians! They will reinforce our league for gold. But what drew him from behind the stockade of Fort Buford? Has he seen the lawyer's advertisement? That is not impossible."

The approaching trio did not notice Hardinge until he attracted their attention by a shout.

"Come on, Dudley. You're the very fellow I've been wishing for for six days. Do I look like a prairie tramp? Well, I'm Thornton Hardinge all the same."

A shout from below told Hardinge that the white man had recognized him, and a few moments later the two men leaned from their saddles and grasped hands.

"Why didn't you come yourself and not send that letter which came nigh getting me into trouble?" asked Dudley.

"The letter?—what letter? I—"

Hardinge stopped stammering, and stared blankly into his friend's face.

"This letter," cried Dudley, thrusting a piece of dingy paper into the fortune-hunter's hands. "One of the soldiers found it fastened to our stockade one morning and brought it to me. But first, like a fool, he showed it to the colonel, and the result was that I instantly found myself on the witness-block. It took some talk lying to get out of it, Hardinge, and I must never go back to Buford. Who was your messenger?"

"I never sent this letter!" exclaimed Hardinge, who had perused the document which read as follows:

"DUDLEY AVERILL:—

The girl never reached Reno. I am scouring the Powder River country for her. *So are others.* A bonanza bigger than a mountain awaits us if we play our cards right. Come to me right away. I am at the mouth of the Little Powder. Secrecy and dispatch, Dudley, and our hands will clutch a ton of gold. The Indians failed us. **THORNTON.**"

"You—never—sent—that letter?" said the sutler slowly.

"I never did, so help me Heaven!"

"Then who did?"

There was no reply.

"I wanted you, anyhow," said Hardinge at last, "and if I had written you I could not have worded the letter any better than this one seems to be. A bonanza does await us—if we find Cyrille. If we lose her we lose stakes worth fighting—ay, worth dying for."

Hardinge was becoming excited; his eyes flashed again.

"I want this letter explained first," said the sutler whose face had been pale from the moment that Hardinge denied the authorship of the mysterious letter. "You did not write it? then, in the name of Heaven—"

He paused and seemed about to reel from the saddle, but recovered in an instant and darting forward clutched Hardinge's arm while his eyes glistened like a madman's.

"Everything is clear now!" he exclaimed. "Your denial explains all. The ghostly being that has followed me since I left Fort Buford—

the strange footprints—the midnight hoofs—the bear that walked on its hinder feet like a man—I am in the dark no longer! Hardinge, the avenger is on my track, and on yours, for you were *there*, and he knows it. He decoyed me from Buford by this letter, and he has sworn that our hands shall never touch the bonanza you have discovered."

Hardinge felt his cheek blanch while the sutler spoke, but assuming new courage, he cried:

"No one shall baffle us! So some one has followed you?" and he tried to smile. "A man whose head looked like a bear's, eh, Dudley? He is called Death Shadow in this country. Red Cloud knows him well."

"Then we are doomed if Negotoo and Monterey are identical!" cried Averill.

"Doomed? Fool! Shall *he* outwit us? We beat him years ago, and he is still the same person, no stronger, no shrewder. Look! we are four against him—four to one, Dudley. Go back if you want to. As for me, I will stay here and win or die."

"So will I," flashed Averill. "A thousand Death Shadows shall not cheat us out of the big bonanza."

"Good! that talk wins," said Hardinge.

"*And this kind avenges!*"

The four men turned in time to see a jet of fire leap from a gun-barrel not far away; Averill reeled from his saddle and fell backward like a man shot dead.

The two Indians involuntarily recoiled; but Hardinge, with an oath, cocked his carbine, and looked defiantly toward the slayer's position.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"THE BEST PARLOR IN CALIFORNIA."

It was getting dark, but Thornton Hardinge could see a singular figure outlined against the gloomy sky.

"It is he—Monterey and Death Shadow!" he murmured. "He thinks he will complete his vengeance here, but I am not dead yet."

Then he turned upon the frightened Indians.

"You see what our enemy has done," he exclaimed, pointing at the body of his comrade lying motionless at the horse's feet. "Let us go and finish him. Fifty dollars in gold to the man who touches or kills him. What! are you cowards?"

The Indians had not stirred.

Hardinge fairly frothed at the mouth.

"Bear-man over there hate pale-face more than Injun. Then let the white men go and fight him," and striking their horses quickly, the two Crows bounded away, leaving the deserter alone.

"The treacherous dogs!" he grated. "I am alone with my old enemy now."

He turned and deliberately rode forward saying:

"If you are a man you will stay and fight me."

There was no response, but when Hardinge reached the spot where the slayer had stood he was suddenly confronted by a man.

He was a singular looking personage for he had the head of a bear; but this almost immediately fell backward like a cowl and revealed his face.

Hardinge did not start; he already knew the wearer of the mask.

For a moment the two men looked at one another,

Negotoo was on foot.

"Get down!" he commanded, and Hardinge dismounted.

"Captain Thornton, we meet at last! Until a few days ago I believed that you and David Dudley fell with the rest in the massacre of the train. My child—yes, she must be my child—put me unconsciously on a new trail which, after leading to Dudley, ends before you. You thought—nay, you knew that Cyrille was worth a fortune, and you saved her from the Sioux hatchets. I ought to thank you, but I cannot; you saved the child and left her mother to die with the others. You made me the Indian's terror, but I fancy you never dreamed that I would turn on you some day, nor that the lips of the baby of the train would become avengers. Now, sir, are you ready? Draw!"

Hardinge as we know had no revolver; the avenger noticed this and put up the one he had drawn.

The next moment the two men stood face to face with ready knives and a second after one reeled away with a wild cry.

It was Hardinge.

The eye that never slept on the trail of vengeance had driven the knife to the seat of life!

A man rode from the spot with the strange head-piece still resting on his shoulders, and the night that lay upon river and plain enveloped him.

It was all over.

The traitors of Travis's Train were dead!

We left Frank Beverly riding from the spot where, locked in the embrace of death Ben Simon and Wildcat were contending for the mastery.

He heard the victorious shout of one, but curiosity did not tempt him to the battle-ground.

If he had journeyed back he would have seen Simon tottering over his old enemy, and heard another, but fainter, for it was his last, cry of triumph. He would have seen the traitor scout pitch forward and fall across the body of his foe.

Enemies in life and trackers of each other, death had finally brought them together.

Simon had betrayed his last victim, and Wildcat had taken his last dose of "Injun."

But Beverly had other plans before him. He was well-mounted now, and having resolved to overtake Cyrille and her rescuers, his enemies, he pushed on. Six days later he was still on the trail, for the trio had procured horses and were hastening toward Fort Buford.

Cyrille wanted to save her father, hunted, as she believed, by Negotoo. But already the blow of vengeance was being prepared, and when it fell she had a father still.

On the night of the seventh day Beverly's long hunt ended. He came suddenly upon a camp-fire at the foot of a hill, and feasted his eyes on the fair young girl whose figure was revealed by the light.

Cyrille was found again; and as Beverly

looked his passions became aroused. Then his eyes fell upon Ned Temple and Uncapa, and flashed fire.

"One bold stroke and she is mine; this time forever!" fell from his lips. "One shot shall follow the other, like drum-beats. The Indian first; then the young viper!"

He had crawled to the edge of the camp, and his pistol hand was raised.

One shot and Cyrille, the prize, would be his.

But, all at once a hand fell like a thunderbolt upon his arm and held it down.

Beverly turned.

"You would make me the sole survivor of Travis's Train, would you?" cried a voice. "You would kill my child?"

Beverly could not speak. The figure before him almost congealed his blood. It was a man with the head of a bear.

"Your child?" he stammered.

"Yes, mine!" and the head flew back, as if operated by a secret spring.

"You are Major Beverly of the army, are you not?"

"I am."

"Then go back to your post and report for duty. I have had enough blood. I don't want yours. Go back!" and while the last words rung in his ears Beverly found himself staggering away from the Terror.

Negotoo watched the officer for a moment, and then sprung toward the camp. An instant later a loud shriek rung from Cyrille's throat.

Ned and the Crow leaped to her assistance.

"At last I have found you—the long-lost Myra!" the bear-man was saying, heedless of Ned and his friend, and the heroine found herself in arms from which she had once fled with a shriek.

Let us stop here.

We need not tell how Cyrille listened to the Terror's story, nor how she gradually learned that he, and not the sutler was her true father.

Ned listened with great interest to the narrative, whose finale greeted the silent watches of the night, and Uncapa moodily kept the camp-fire burning.

A few weeks later the Frisco attorneys learned that the Monterey family was not altogether among the dead, and forgotten, and Cyrille or Myra, as the new-found father called her, found the fortune that awaited her; or the "bonanza," as Hardinge called it.

Of course Ned Temple won the prize, and Frank Beverly, cashiered and disgraced, although he was a brave officer, returned to Sioux land to drift into a desperado's life whose exploits have often claimed the writer's pen.

Uncapa revealed Hardinge's treachery, and Cyrille shuddered when she heard that the two savages who conducted her from Buford to Reno had been paid to slay.

Red Cloud lost his daughter, of course, but he also lost the terror of his camps, and to-day the Sioux seeks his robes with the assurance that the bear-head of the old enemy will not look down upon him while he sleeps.

Ben Simon, as we know, never toasted his feet in the "best parlor in California," for Cyrille's face was its sunshine while his bones bleached on the woody slopes of Bald Top.

THE END.

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